

# THE CRUISE of the CONQUEROR

Being the Further Adventures  
of the Motor Pirate



THE CONQUEROR

**THE CRUISE OF THE CONQUEROR**









**"WITH THE BURSTING OF THE SHELL WE AT LAST GAINED  
A VIEW OF OUR ADVERSARY"**

*(See page 193)*

# The Cruise of the Conqueror

Being the Further Adventures of the Motor Pirate

By

**B. Sidney Paternoster**

*Author of "The Motor Pirate," etc.*

With a Frontispiece by Frank C. Merrill



Toronto \* \* \*

**Hoole Publishing Company**

(LIMITED)

\* \* \* M C M E I

PR 6031

A73

C78

1906

2 2 2

*Copyright, 1905*

BY STREET & SMITH

*Copyright, 1906*

BY L. C. PAGE & COMPANY

(INCORPORATED)

*All rights reserved*

First Impression, March, 1906

COLONIAL PRESS

*Electrotyped and Printed by C. H. Simonds & Co.  
Boston, U. S. A.*

# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE COMING OF THE CONQUEROR . . .	1
II. THE LAST RACE FOR THE CROSS-CHANNEL CUP . . . . .	12
III. RELATES HOW THE DEAD CAME TO LIFE .	24
IV. OF THE LIVING WHO BECAME AS DEAD .	35
V. I LOSE MY IDENTITY . . . . .	45
VI. IN WHICH THE PIRATE HOLDS UP THE DUNSTER CASTLE . . . . .	55
VII. CONCERNING THE FRUITS OF A PIRATE'S PHILOSOPHY . . . . .	65
VIII. TELLING OF ANOTHER MEETING OF THE MIST WITH THE PIRATE . . . . .	75
IX. CONCERNING SOME OF THE DELIGHTS OF DEATH . . . . .	85
X. WE HOLD A COUNCIL OF WAR . . . . .	95
XI. WHEREIN MY GHOST WALKS . . . . .	105
XII. IN WHICH MANNERING ESCAPES THE TOILS	115
XIII. I DECIDE TO RETAIN MY GHOSTLY CHAR- ACTER . . . . .	125
XIV. IN WHICH I START ON A CRUISE . . .	135
XV. TELLING OF THE DISCOVERY INSPECTOR FORREST HAD MADE . . . . .	145
XVI. IN WHICH WE ARE CONFRONTED WITH A MYSTERY OF THE SEA . . . . .	155
XVII. WE MEET THE MARY . . . . .	165
XVIII. WHICH TELLS OF A PIRATE'S CAPACITY FOR LIQUOR . . . . .	176

CHAPTER		PAGE
XIX.	SHOWS HOW THE CONQUEROR JUSTIFIES HER NAME . . . . .	186
XX.	IN WHICH THE MARY MEETS WITH POETIC JUSTICE . . . . .	197
XXI.	WE ARRIVE AT PORT MAHON . . . . .	207
XXII.	OF THE USE OF A WATCH . . . . .	218
XXIII.	THE PIRATE INVITES EVIE TO DINNER . . . . .	228
XXIV.	THE PIRATE STILL LINGERS IN LONDON . . . . .	239
XXV.	WE RENEW THE PURSUIT . . . . .	250
XXVI.	WHICH TELLS HOW THE CONQUEROR OUT- MANŒUVRED US . . . . .	261
XXVII.	WHEREIN WE FIND A LIKELY HARBOUR . . . . .	272
XXVIII.	WE STRIKE A HOT SCENT . . . . .	283
XXIX.	FOUND AND LOST . . . . .	294
XXX.	THE CAPTURE OF THE CONQUEROR . . . . .	306

# THE CRUISE OF THE CONQUEROR

## CHAPTER I.

### THE COMING OF THE CONQUEROR

WHEN, eight years ago, I laid down my pen after telling, as plainly as my poor abilities would allow, the history of Randolph Mannering, known to fame as the Motor Pirate, that prince of criminals who, with his mysterious motor-car, had spread consternation throughout the length and breadth of the land, I had imagined that certainly not in this world, and I fervently hoped not in the next, should I look upon his dark, handsome face again. Indeed, there was warrant for my belief that he had long since gone to his doom. No one who had stood, as I had stood, on the edge of the cliff at Land's End and looked down upon the sea boiling amongst the rocks beneath, could ever have imagined that the man who had taken that awful plunge could survive. I could never recall the experience and think how near I had been to sharing a similar fate without a shudder. For a long time, in fact, the memory was sufficient to destroy the delight I had customarily felt in watching a beautiful sunset. When I looked upon the gathering glow in the west there would arise

## 2      The Cruise of the Conqueror

before my eyes the picture of the sun setting over the sea as on that evening when Mannering escaped us. I saw again the fire-streaked sky, the Longships standing up like a pillar of black marble against the light, and the Cassiterides hanging cloudlike on the horizon, and where Mannering had been — nothing.

I had no doubt then that he had met the fate he so richly merited, and for seven years I remained in happy confidence that mine enemy was dead. If any one had even ventured to hint at the possibility of his escape I should have laughed him to scorn. It was nothing to me that his body had never been found. The sea at Land's End is tenacious of its prey, and hides its victims away in its deep pools and dark caverns when it does not tear their bodies limb from limb in its wild play amongst the sharp-toothed rocks. If I had not felt assured of his death I should not have had a moment's peace. Nor would my wife. For seven years Evie, I am certain, never laid her head on the pillow at night without breathing a prayer of thankfulness that Mannering was dead. Then the unexpected happened, as it always does happen. On August 15th, 19—, the dead came to life. On that day I looked again on the face of Randolph Mannering.

But before I write of that meeting let me chronicle briefly what had happened to myself during the seven years which had passed peacefully over my head, for it was owing to a change which had taken place in my pursuits that I found my life once again identified with the exploits of this singular personality.

## The Coming of the Conqueror 3

These seven years were very peaceful, very happy, years to me. They had brought changes with them, of course. My aunt, good old soul, to whom I owed my introduction to Evie, had gone the way of all good old souls, and had left me a very comfortable addition to my estate. That is the only death I have to chronicle. Colonel Maitland was well and hearty, and just as capable of judging wine or an *entrée* as he had ever been. Inspector Forrest still remained at Scotland Yard, and had even refused the promotion which had been offered him more than once, because he would not give up the excitement of the active pursuit of criminals for bureaucratic service, while his assistant Laver had also attained to an inspectorship. But the chief change which had taken place in my habits had been directly due to the Motor Pirate. For a long time after my wedding I had practically given up motoring. It was not of my own volition. It grieved me horribly to see my beautiful Mercédès standing idle in the *garage* day after day, but the fact was that Evie had got a horror of the pastime. I was not exactly surprised at this in view of what she had gone through, though I did regret that her horror extended so far as to debar me from even an occasional ride in my car. She managed to get over the fear in time. As a matter of fact, the arrival of a second Evie on the scene drove away the brooding horror of the past. With her little hands — they were really the most perfect models of hands I ever saw — and her clear gray eyes — she inherited



#### 4      The Cruise of the Conqueror

those from her mother, too — she soon scattered all the ghastly memories of the Motor Pirate.

But before this ray of sunshine came to brighten our lives, I had turned from motoring on land to another branch of the sport. Once infected with the fascination of motor travel one is inoculated for life. It is not a disease like scarlet fever or the measles. Some of the old-fashioned squires who have been dragged about the country at the tails of a pair of bays for six score years would possibly declare the disease bears a greater resemblance to leprosy, and the comparison holds in so far as there is no cure but annihilation of the patient for either. Well, the fascination of motoring had so gripped me, that being barred from the use of my car through Evie's fears, I turned my attention to motor-boating. I found my reward, not only in my wife's smiles, though those alone would have been ample repayment, but in the sport itself. Motoring on land with a 40 or 60 h. p. engine throbbing under the bonnet of the car, when, coming into the straight, you see a white ribbon of road stretching for miles ahead, and giving her a full dose of petrol you sit firm while the hedges flit by like a skein of green silk, is exciting enough, but it is nothing to the sensation which grips you when you take the wheel of the motor-boat in your hand and put her full speed ahead in the face of a twenty-mile breeze. Doctors recommend vibration treatment for many purposes nowadays, but I will guarantee that there is no vibration so exhilarating as that produced by the swiftly

## The Coming of the Conqueror 5

moving screw of the motor-boat and — well, any one who has been at the wheel of a motor-boat in a race which goes to the swift will tell you more of the delights than I have space for.

I did not know this, of course, when I started my boating career. For one reason I did not commence with anything great in the way of either speed or power. We had taken a cottage at Bourne End soon after we were married, for the air of my Norfolk home had proved too bracing for Evie, and the Thames does not provide a great deal of opportunity for speed trials. I started with a little 14 h. p. Brooke, and when she became insufficient for my desires, I bought a 28 b. h. p. Thornycroft, only to find that I could never get an opportunity of finding out her capabilities without interfering with the comfort of the adoring couples who drift down the river in skiff or canoe absolutely regardless of anything in the universe but themselves. I felt sympathetically towards them in those days, I remember, and so I determined to find some spot where I could indulge in my new hobby without interfering with anybody.

It was owing to this desire that I eventually found myself settled at Salcombe, and any one who has once found his way to that secluded little town nestling between the Start and Bolt Head must needs agree with me that of all the beauty spots in the beautiful west country there is none to beat and few to compare with it. But its beauty was only one of its recommendations in my eyes. For any one fond of boating there is no

## The Cruise of the Conqueror

more delightful place in the kingdom. Whatever the weather may happen to be, the estuary which runs into Kingsbridge some ten miles distant is available at all tides. Outside the bar, which makes entrance to the harbour impossible to anything but comparatively small craft, the seas may thunder and roar, but inside the fiercest sou'wester is powerless for harm. Time was when the little town tucked away under shelter of the cliffs sent its ships to do their part in the wars with the Spaniards and its sons to win their meed of fame under Drake and Raleigh. But that day has long since passed by, and now its inhabitants engage in more peaceful pursuits, in fishing and taking in each other's washing, and in welcoming the select little band of summer visitors who prize its natural attractions far beyond the more garish delights of popular watering-places.

When once I had seen Salcombe I decided that there was no other place which would suit me half so well, and Evie fell in love with it so soon as she had seen it, even as I had done, and so for the past five years I should think we have spent six months at least of every year in its delightful atmosphere.

Here I found every facility for indulgence in my new hobby, and when my aunt died — finding I had a good sum of ready cash available — I set up a workshop and began to build a boat of my own. Yes, the fascination of the sport had got hold of me to such an extent that nothing would satisfy me short of trying my luck in the great international contests, and I set to

## The Coming of the Conqueror 7

work to build a boat which should fulfil my ambitions.

Very proud of her I was when the boat took the water. There was a curious little incident which accompanied her christening. She was to have been named the *Eve*, and my little daughter was to have performed the ceremony, but in her excitement she threw the bottle of champagne—I had provided a flask of specially thin glass for the purpose—so far that if my engineer had not given the boat a hearty shove the bottle would have missed her altogether. As it was, instead of saying "I name you the *Eve*," she said, "I name you the — missed — oh, no, it hasn't. Whatever shall we do, father? The boat is in the water."

"The *Mist* you've called her, Missy," said my engineer, "and a fairer name for a flyer I've never heard tell of, not to say as the *Eve* mightn't have lived up to her reputation for tempting a man to destruction, and it's as unlucky to give a boat a bad name as a dog."

A curious character was Nat Sanders. A red-haired, yellow-bearded, wiry little man, with a grip like iron and a love for his engines only equalled by his superstitious fears. The latter must have come from the Scotch blood in him.

"It would be just temptin' Providence to call her the *Eve*," he continued.

"Yes," I replied. "You have given her a name, Evie, and you cannot give her another."

"I don't know what you mean," she said, screwing

## 8      The Cruise of the Conqueror

up her little forehead. "I is quite sure I didn't call her anything."

"You called her the *Mist*, and a 'Mist of the Sea' she will prove to be if my anticipations are correct. She ought to be fast enough to look more like a mist-wreath than anything else to all observers."

She clapped her hands gaily. "The 'Mist of the Sea' is ever so much prettier a name than 'Eve.'"

I did not agree with that, but the *Mist* she remained, nevertheless. She was a beautiful boat, 40 ft. long, 4 ft. 6 in. in the beam, and her lines — well, I have heard men rave about the curves of the Venus de Milo, but if the model for that Venus had happened to have had one curve equal to the sheer of the *Mist* she would have had reason to have considered herself a proud woman. And she was as powerful as she was beautiful. I had engined her heavily, too heavily I thought, but Sanders was of another opinion, and I let him put into her two four-cylinder engines, developing 250 h. p. to drive her twin screws. He said that as she was built of special mild steel throughout she would be able to stand it easily, and I hoped he would prove a truthful prophet.

I shall never forget my delight when I found that she answered to my expectations. I had only Sanders with me when I first put her full speed ahead, and though I had made as certain as was humanly possible that in every detail she was sound and tight, yet there was a possibility that under the enormous strain of the screws she might bend and break up like an old tin

## The Coming of the Conqueror 9

kettle if there was a flaw anywhere. But she developed no defect, and with the two screws buzzing like a whole hive of bees I learned what perfect motion was. It was a beautiful June day with just enough breeze to set the little flag in the stern fluttering, but as soon as she felt her engines the flag stood out as stiff as a piece of cardboard, and the breeze I had to face as I stood wheel in hand was a twenty-five knot breeze. Yes, that was the speed she developed at her first trial, and afterward over a measured course on the Kingsbridge River, as our estuary was named, I managed to get a fair thirty knots out of her.

But I must not linger over the description of my new acquisition, though I could dwell upon her manifold excellencies for a month. Beautiful as she was it would have been better for me and better for those dear to me if she had been broken up into scrap-iron and sunk beneath the calm waters of the Kingsbridge River at that first trial. Then I should probably never again have looked upon the face of my dreaded rival, never again have been compelled to match my strength and cunning against his, not only in self-preservation, but in a fight for the life and safety of those dear to me. But I anticipate.

However, the *Mist* fulfilled my anticipations, and when, after a number of trials, I succeeded in getting thirty knots out of her, I confidently anticipated that I should not only be able to carry off the International Cup, but stand a very good chance in the Cross-Channel Race. I should like to tell how the *Mist* brought

## 10      The Cruise of the Conqueror

back the cup to British waters, but that has nothing to do with the further history of the Motor Pirate. It was a great race, and if my American opponent had not blown out one of her sparking plugs ten minutes before the finish, I am not certain that the cup would not have gone across the Atlantic. Once the American was out of it there was nothing left to beat, for the French boat was some distance behind, and the *Mist*, lasting to the end, won an easy victory. Still it was with the knowledge that the *Mist* would have to do her best in the Cross-Channel contests that I took her on to Calais for the other event. I knew the American would be thoroughly overhauled, so I saw that nothing in my own boat was wanting, and the night before the race I felt pretty confident as to the result, and so, I fancy, did my rival.

But the adage of the cup and the lip once more proved its accuracy. When I turned out of bed on the morning of the fifteenth my first glance was at the sky. It was cloudless, and there was just that haze on the horizon which gave promise of a hot, windless day. For my own part I should have been glad to have seen signs of a breeze, for I fancied that the *Mist* would be better able to stand a little sea than the *Challenger*, my American rival. But the Channel was calm as a pond, and with the consciousness that the *Mist* would have to do all she knew I looked forward to a really great time.

Having satisfied myself as to weather prospects, I looked down into the harbour where the *Mist* lay

## The Coming of the Conqueror 11

amongst a fleet of motor-boats of all sorts and sizes. Then I received a great surprise. An addition had been made to the fleet since the previous night, for resting serenely half a cable's length from the *Mist* lay a boat which glowed in the morning sun as if she had been built of burnished gold.

"Hullo!" I cried. "What boat is that?"

My cry awakened my wife, and rubbing her eyes she was soon by my side and looking at the stranger. She had insisted on being present at the race, and had come over by the *Queen* on the previous day accompanied by Evie, whom, indeed, I had been half-inclined to allow to accompany Sanders and me on this occasion.

We both looked down upon the stranger with considerable interest, and, indeed, she could not have failed to attract attention anywhere. I soon saw that I was not the only person interested in her, and as I was too far off to satisfy my curiosity I slipped into my flannels and ran down-stairs to join the little group of observers already gazing upon her from the pier.

Little I guessed, and little any one else in the group gathered on the pier guessed, who was the owner of the golden boat which rocked so lightly on the surface of the water, and in what desperate deeds she was so shortly to play a part. If the least suspicion had been awakened in any one's mind, I dare swear that there would not have been a single man in the group who would not have gladly lent a hand in at once putting an end to any opportunity she would have had for mischief.



## CHAPTER II.

### THE RACE FOR THE CROSS-CHANNEL CUP

UPON reaching the pier I gazed at the new arrival for a couple of minutes, taking in all the detail I could. She was a beautiful boat and well worth scrutiny. The man who built her evidently knew something about boat-building, and I wondered that nothing had hitherto appeared about her in the press. It was not only her size that made her remarkable, though that was the point which first struck the observer. She dwarfed every other boat in the basin. So far as I could judge she boasted an 80 ft. run and a 9 ft. beam, being just about double the size of the *Mist*, and I knew that if she was engined to her apparent capacity and in a style to match the build of her hull, that, barring accidents, the *Mist* would have to forego the honour of finishing first in the day's race, even though she might win in her class.

I was still engaged in my scrutiny, for I must confess the lines of the golden boat had put me somewhat out of conceit with the *Mist*, when a dry voice remarked in my ear, "A guile-lookin' boat, yon, Mr. Sutgrove?"

I had not observed Sanders's approach, and as I

turned to him I remarked, "Much too good-looking to please me. If she is as good as she looks I'm afraid the race is over so far as we are concerned."

"All's not gold that gleeters," replied my engineer, sententiously, as he produced a half-consumed cigar from his waistcoat pocket and placed it between his teeth. "Though I'm not sayin' as aluminium bronze isn't better than gold when it comes to boat-building."

"So that's what she's built of, is it?" I asked. "I wondered what it might be."

"Aluminium bronze by the polish she wears," he continued, "and if she's not a millionaire's toy kettle, I'm no so certain as she will not bustle us a little into cuttin' a few seconds off our record when it comes to racin'."

I laughed at Sanders's calm assumption of the superiority of our own boat.

"Ye may laugh," he said, gravely. "But no race is finished till it's ended, and, spite of the ornamental exterior, yon boat may not be in the first flight, after all."

"We should have a better chance of gauging her capabilities if we could overhaul her engines," I remarked.

"Preceesely," he replied, "or, failin' that, if we knew the name of the mon as built 'em."

"Well, we can hardly overhaul the engines in the owner's absence and without his permission," I said. "But there might be a chance of learning something

## 14      The Cruise of the Conqueror

about her from her engineer. He must be staying in Calais."

"Same hotel as ourselves," Sanders answered. "I've discovered that much an' that her name is the *Conqueror*, but as for finding out anything else it's like trying to pump your feed-tank full from an empty storage."

"You have tried, then?" I inquired.

"Tried?" answered Sanders. "Tried? The engineer who designed that man forgot to supply him with an exhaust valve. Every man will talk about the thing he loves, whether it's wife or bairns or engines, — leastways until I met that one-eyed, lop-eared blacksmith as greases that pretty tin toy yonder, I was of that opinion, but as for him, nothin' softer than a cold chisel would open his jaw." He rammed his fists into his pockets as he spoke and chewed the stump of his cigar viciously, so that I guessed that his thirst for knowledge regarding a possible rival had been unslaked by a single drop of information.

"Well, we shall soon see what the stranger is made of if he starts," I said.

"We shall have the opportunity, right enough," said Sanders. "Her owner hasn't brought her all the way from the other side of nowhere for nothing."

"Whom does she belong to?" I asked.

"I can't exactly remember his name," said Sanders. "All I know is that she is one of the dark horses which had been entered and nobody expected to turn up. Belongs to a Spanish Don by all accounts."

"Oh! Then we may not have much to fear, after all," I remarked, and, feeling much more comfortable, I turned on my heel and made for the end of the pier. It is true I had not anticipated meeting a competitor of such size, though, of course, I had been aware that the new rule made it quite possible that the *Mist* might have to meet a rival double her size. But, after all, if we were going to be beaten, it was no use worrying about it beforehand, and there would be plenty of opportunity in the future for having another shot for victory.

So I had my dip in the sea and returned to the hotel for my coffee and rolls before taking my wife and Evie for a short spin in the *Mist* in order to make sure that everything was in perfect order. There was no doubt on this important point, and it was with a renewal of confidence that we returned to our hotel for *déjeuner*. By the time our meal was finished, the *Queen* was blowing her horn as a signal for the passengers to go aboard, since, warned by previous experience, the captain was aware that, if his passengers were to see anything of the race, he would have to start well ahead of the motor-boats. So I convoyed my wife and Evie on board and returned to the landing-stage, where Sanders awaited me with the *Mist*.

Meanwhile I had inquired at the hotel as to the owner of the golden boat, and had been informed that Sanders's information had been correct. The owner had arrived late the previous night and had given his name as Don Juan Davila de Leon, and when I heard

## 16      The Cruise of the Conqueror

it I laughed. The idea of being beaten by a Spaniard seemed too ridiculous to be entertained for a moment, and, when Sanders inquired whether I had discovered anything concerning the new competitor, I assured him that we should have more to fear from our old rival, the American *Challenger*, than from the unknown. We had no time to discuss the matter, for at this moment the warning gun was fired, and, donning our oilskins, we stepped aboard, and, leaving Sanders to start the engines, I went to the wheel, and the moment she felt the helm I moved quietly down to my station. As it happened, the *Mist* was one of the last boats to take her place, and I observed that the *Conqueror* occupied the farthest station to port, lying barely a cable's length from the French destroyer which had been commissioned to accompany the race. As for the boat I really feared, the *Challenger*, she occupied the next station to mine, also to port. One advantage I had over both these competitors. Twice previously I had steered the *Mist* over the course, while neither of them had, so far as I knew, such an experience, and their skippers would, therefore, have to depend upon a merely theoretical knowledge of the currents.

But there was not much time to take many observations. The *Queen* was already a mile away, and the fleet of boats only awaited the signal to start. I felt my heart beginning to beat faster as the moment arrived, — there is nothing tries my nerves so much as the strain of such a moment, — and the boom of the starting gun was like music to my ears, even though the

clatter of the engines from the open exhaust nearly drowned it. I did not wait to hear the report, though. The instant I saw the white puff of smoke, jamming down the starting lever, I felt the clutch hold, and the next moment the throb of the engine running free was exchanged for a steady vibration as the propeller bit the water. The *Mist* behaved like the little lady she had always showed herself to be. It seemed as if she had gauged the extent of the task before her. Gently I increased the supply of petrol, and within fifteen seconds of the start she was running at her top speed, and doing so as easily as if she was merely working at half-pressure on the Kingsbridge River. Jove! I was pleased with her. I ventured to cast a glance round, and I saw that I had slipped my competitors, though not by a great deal, for the *Challenger* was coming along like a meteor on my quarter, and close behind her half a dozen other boats were slipping through the water at a pace which showed that reliability would prove as essential as speed in the final result.

"We shall want all we've got," I shouted to Sanders, "though if we don't manage to get a bit more before we are through, I shall be surprised."

He answered me with a happy chuckle.

"The Spaniard seems to have got left," he said, a moment later, and it was my turn to chuckle.

Then, feeling the tide, I brought the *Mist* closer into the stream, for I knew that the tide would be running more strongly when we approached Dover, and I intended to make use of my knowledge. The *Chal-*

## 18      The Cruise of the Conqueror

*lenger* did not follow my example, but, making a straight point for Dover, was soon, to all appearances, ahead of me. The tide was even stronger than I had anticipated, so I held on my course until Sanders became uneasy, for he asked me, anxiously, "Are ye no holding on too long to starboard, Mr. Sutgrove? It's a long way out of our course you are taking us."

"You will see in a minute," I answered, glancing round.

Though only five minutes had elapsed since the start, the fleet was scattered already. Some of the lighter boats were steering the course I had set, but the majority, depending upon their strength, had made no allowance for the drift and were spread out like a fan. I felt quite satisfied with my position, and so far as I could see the race was at our mercy. It is true the *Challenger* was nearer home, but I knew that when, in my turn, I chose to take advantage of the tide, I should soon pick up all I had lost.

But I had reckoned without one competitor. I was soon to discover that the *Conqueror* was determined to justify her name. What had detained her at the start, — I heard afterwards that she had waited until every other boat had cleared the harbour before starting in the most leisurely fashion, — she soon began to pick up her competitors. I had ceased to think about her until about twenty minutes from the gun-fire. Then the first intimation I had that she was in the race at all was a flash of golden light, as far as I could judge, about a couple of miles astern, and I could see that

the Spaniard was steering the same course as ourselves. I called Sanders's attention to her. "There's the toy boat," I cried. "What's her chance of picking up the *Mist* now?"

Sanders raised a pair of field-glasses to his eyes and gazed steadily in her direction. Then, laying them down, he turned his attention to the petrol pump.

"There's no hurry for more petrol," I remarked, banteringly. "You pumped the feed-tank full barely half a minute ago."

"It's no use takin' any risks with a fast craft like that on your quarter," he remarked.

I looked again in her direction. It seemed as if Sanders's uneasiness was not without warrant. The golden light was something more than an occasional flash now, it was a continual reflection. I saw her shoot by one of the boats which was plugging manfully along, although hopelessly out of it, but even now I did not credit that she would be able to wipe off the distance by which the *Mist* was leading. By this time I reckoned that I had fetched far enough to the eastward, and I put the *Mist* a couple of points nearer her true course. I heard Sanders give a grunt of satisfaction. The *Mist* darted away on her new course, and she seemed to skim the surface of the water as she shot on towards her goal. I determined not to look back, and for five minutes I kept my resolution. It was the exclamation of Sanders, "She's creeping up," which made me break it.

He was right. In one glance I could see that the



## 20      The Cruise of the Conqueror

stranger had diminished our lead by half. Again I looked eagerly ahead. The white cliffs were growing bigger every second, and I shouted to Sanders to give me the time.

"One fifty-five, preceesely," he answered.

We had started at one-thirty exactly, and I knew that, as the *Mist* had been doing if anything a little more than her previous best, we were nearly two-thirds of the way across. Two minutes later I looked back again. The stranger was still creeping up. I could see the head of her skipper looking out over the bonnet.

"If she can keep it up, we are beaten," I said.

"By the lop-eared Belfast blacksmith," growled Sanders, and again I heard him rumping savagely at the petrol pump.

"And what about the American . . ." I asked.

"We shall beat him, anyway," answered the engineer. "He's laying up for the harbour in the teeth of the tide, and we are doing two feet to his one, I reckon."

At this moment I became aware of the beat of another screw besides our own. The stranger was coming on with an irresistible rush, and, in spite of my disappointment, I could not help admiring her. Her motion was scarcely that of a boat, she rode so lightly on the surface. She was more like some gorgeous bird, and it would not have surprised me to see her unfold a pair of wings and take to flight. Only the huge wash astern and the growl of her propellers told of the ex-

traordinary power of the engines that drove her onwards at such incredible speed.

"I only wish he may blow his sparking plugs out," I heard Sanders mutter viciously. "It's taken him just twelve minutes, since I gave you the time, for him to overtake us."

"At that rate," I replied, after a rapid calculation, "he must be travelling close on forty knots."

"He's doing a bit more than that," answered the engineer.

"It's impossible," I replied. "There must be something wrong with the *Mist*."

She drew level, and, as she did so, her skipper, standing at the wheel, courteously lifted his hat. I responded, and in a moment she was ahead and leaving us every second.

"You will find there is nothing wrong with the *Mist* when you see the time," remarked Sanders, "and if you had made her an eighty-footer and had given her 500 h. p. engines, we should have beaten that chap by just as much as he has beaten us."

"Something may happen yet," I said, voicing a hope I was far from feeling.

We were heading straight for the harbour, and we could see the fringe of people lining the front, and gathered in a black mass on the pier-head. The *Conqueror* continued to shoot ahead, and the boom of a gun, followed by a roar of cheers, announced to us that we perforce had to be contented with second place. The Spaniard got home just eight seconds ahead of

## 22      The Cruise of the Conqueror

us, our time being thirty-eight minutes ten and a fifth, and the *Challenger* finishing five seconds later, with two Frenchmen and a German close at his stern.

I felt pretty sick at the result. Not that I had any fault to find with the *Mist*. She had covered the course of forty-one kilometres at practically thirty-five knots for the whole distance. But I reckoned that the winner could travel forty knots to my thirty-five, and naturally I was dissatisfied. An additional aggravation was that the winner was a nonentity in the motor world, at least so far as I knew. I think I am sportsman enough to take a licking philosophically, but one does like to know something of the person at whose hands one suffers defeat.

I was to know before long, but the knowledge was not to comfort me. I obtained it, indeed, that same evening when I strolled out on to the pier to smoke my after-dinner cigar. To everybody's surprise, the winner of the race had taken a private room at the Lord Warden, and had managed to set at defiance even the ubiquitous pressmen. I was not a little interested, therefore, to see the golden boat drawn up at a landing-stage, and a couple of men standing on the stage as if about to embark.

The opportunity for finding out something about my successful rival was too good to be missed. Besides, after dinner I felt in a more equable frame of mind and quite capable of congratulating my opponent. So passing down the steps I approached the owner of the

*Conqueror*, and, raising my cap, I said: "Allow me to congratulate you on your win, señor."

His face was in deep shadow, but as I spoke the stranger came forward into the light.

"Hullo, Sutgrove," he remarked. "So we have met again, eh?"

I could neither speak nor move. It was *Mannerling*.

## CHAPTER III.

### RELATES HOW THE DEAD CAME TO LIFE

To be suddenly confronted with a man whom one had seen plunge, apparently to certain destruction, from the cliff at Land's End is enough, I should imagine, to paralyze anybody's faculties, and I confess I stood and stared at him as if he were veritably a ghost.

"You? you?" I gasped, when at last I recovered the use of my tongue. "Impossible!"

"Nothing's impossible," he answered, coolly, "not even for the dead to return to life."

The sneer which curved his lips as he spoke re-awakened me to the full use of my faculties, and I remembered that I was in the presence of my deadliest enemy, the man who had sought to steal away my bride and at the same time to lure me to my own destruction. As in the past, he seemed to be gifted with the power of reading my thoughts.

"You need not be afraid," he said, with another sneer. "I do not intend at the present moment to exact payment for your impertinent interference with my affairs, unless" — he tapped his pocket significantly — "unless I find it essential for my own safety to get rid of you forthwith."

## How the Dead Came to Life 25

"I am extremely obliged to you," I answered, with an assumption of indifference I was far from feeling, "but I am very well prepared to take care of myself," and I imitated his action by tapping the spot where my hip pocket should have been.

He laughed before he replied, "Pooh! Sutgrove, what is the use of trying that sort of bluff upon me? Englishmen don't carry pistols in their pockets when they take an after-dinner stroll on the pier. At least, I don't suppose they have acquired the habit since the Motor Pirate came to such a melodramatic end."

I had nothing to say in reply. I could only stare at him helplessly, and, as he laughed again, he reminded me of a cat playing with a mouse. I was just considering whether I should not spring upon him and take my chance of coming out of the encounter successfully, when he remarked, quietly: "I am not at all sorry we have met, Sutgrove; it will be like old times to have a chat with you."

I muttered something or other while I glanced about me to see if there was any one at hand upon whom I would call for assistance. We had the landing-stage to ourselves, and I observed that Mannering's companion had placed himself at the head of the steps by which I had descended to it. My escape that way was clearly cut off. I realized, too, that if I threw myself upon Mannering he would have plenty of time to make an end of me and escape in his boat without a chance of capture. There was nothing to be done but make the best of the position and await an oppor-

tunity, and yet, though realizing this, I could not help remarking: "I don't know but that I could have spared myself the pleasure of meeting you again."

"The pleasure is mine. I was not thinking of you," he replied, grimly. "In fact, when I saw you and Mrs. Sutgrove from my bedroom window at Calais this morning, I determined to renew the old acquaintanceship at the earliest possible moment, and, I think for the first time, I did not regret that you had failed to follow my example and taken a header over the cliff, as I intended you should."

"So that really was your intention?" I asked.

"Undoubtedly," he answered, calmly. "I thought that once on the slope you would inevitably follow my example."

"The car did," I said. "We fortunately left the car in time."

"By 'we' I presume you refer to that detective person who proved himself so blind to every scrap of evidence as to the personality of the Motor Pirate?"

"Yes," I answered. "Inspector Forrest was my companion, and if it pleases you to know that I am alive, it should please you equally to learn that he also is not only alive but as active as ever."

"Delighted to hear it," replied Mannering, lightly. "I hope it will be my privilege to lead him another dance, and you—I am half-inclined to let you live and dance to the same tune."

The lightness of his tone made my blood run cold, but I ground my teeth and determined that, when the

opportunity arrived, I would make a fight for my life. At any rate, I was not going to let him see that I feared him, so I laughed, though even to my own ears there seemed to be a false ring about my merriment.

"That is as may be," I said. It had occurred to me that the longer I waited the better might become my chance of some one approaching near enough to lend me assistance, and I determined to gain time.

"There is no doubt you will not live five seconds longer than I choose," he remarked, and I saw a gleam of light flash from the barrel of the revolver he had drawn from his pocket.

"Well," I answered, with as steady a tone as I could manage, "if you are intending to carry out your threat, you may as well tell me how you managed to make your escape. I shall be compelled to haunt you unless you satisfy my curiosity on the subject."

"You take matters coolly," he replied, "and as it is rather a long time since I have talked with an educated Englishman, I don't know that I will not oblige you." He took a cigarette-case from his pocket with his left hand and held it out to me. As I helped myself to a cigarette, I watched him narrowly, but the finger of the right hand was on the trigger all the time. He helped himself, replaced the box in his pocket, and took a light from the match which I struck, without giving me half a chance to get on even terms with him.

"There is no need to stand," he continued. "You may as well be seated." He pointed to the head of



## 28      The Cruise of the Conqueror

a baulk of timber raised a couple of feet above the planking of the stage. "If you let your feet dangle over the edge, the water won't reach you for another hour."

There was a tone of command in his voice, which, added to the persuasive effects of his levelled revolver, decided me to do as he suggested, though to seat myself on the very edge seemed like driving a nail into my own coffin. One shot and I should drop lifeless into the water, and—but I could not contemplate such an end. There was another alternative. If no other opportunity offered I might drop into the water and under cover of the darkness make good my escape. Such a scheme seemed feasible enough, so I settled myself with more calmness to listen to what my companion had to say. He lazily followed my example, seating himself on a similar baulk a yard away.

"Mine really was a remarkable escape," he began, "and, truth to tell, I was more surprised than ever you were. You have never taken a really big dive, I suppose, Sutgrove?"

"Twenty feet is about my limit," I answered.

"When you are in the mood try one of two or three hundred feet," he said. "I am sure you will not find a more thrilling sensation anywhere."

"So I should suppose," I could not help remarking.

"It is just as well to do it in a motor-car," he continued, "for you get a good send-off, and if the car only behaves properly and keeps the right side up, you get something to break your fall. At least that is

what I imagine must have happened to me, though I haven't an absolutely clear recollection as to what actually did occur. I suppose you did not see?"

"No," I replied. "When we saw you disappear, Forrest and I suddenly became aware of our own peril and jumped out of the car, and when we picked ourselves up and got to the edge of the cliff, there was nothing to be seen but a few odd bits of wreckage."

"I expect I was one of those bits of wreckage," said Mannering. "I knew where I was running and put on full speed. You probably know how my car was built, on the Lanchester principle, with the engine under the body instead of under the bonnet, like the majority of cars."

"Yes," I said. "I had an excellent opportunity of examining your car."

"I think I owe my life to that fact," he continued. "The weight of the car was so evenly distributed that when she left Mother Earth for Father Ocean she fell horizontally. Even then I don't see how it came about unless there was a slight rise at the edge of the cliff, but the fact remains that she struck the water at only a slight angle, breaking the impact for me and shooting me out to perform a header on my own account twenty or thirty yards away. When I came to the surface I floated about for a minute or two, for I felt a bit dazed, but the water soon put me right, and I swam in under the rocks and hauled myself to a place of safety out of sight of any one on top."

"You had the devil's own luck," I remarked.

### 30      The Cruise of the Conqueror

"Just what I thought," he replied. "It seemed so evident that I was not destined to be drowned that I determined there and then to devote myself to motor-boating."

In spite of the precarious tenure upon which I held my life I could not help being curious for further particulars. "Even now I do not see how you managed to escape," I said.

"The rest was not so difficult," he answered. "You probably imagined that my flight to the west was the mere purposeless whim of a madman, or else the despairing effort of a detected criminal."

I had thought so and I told him so, whereat he laughed sardonically.

"Nothing of the kind," he assured me. "You might have given me credit for ordinary common sense. My proceedings, if you have studied them carefully, would have shown themselves as all being part of an elaborately conceived plan. Why should you have imagined me capable of working out such a scheme and yet omitting such an essential as provision of the means of escape?"

I could answer him nothing. I realized with a shock how for seven years I had allowed myself to rest in easy security, while all the time the Pirate was alive and busy organizing new plans for preying upon his fellows.

There was a note of sarcasm in Mannering's voice as he continued. "My only fear was that some mischance might have befallen the provision I had made

for my escape, for curiously enough I had never anticipated being so pressed. It never occurred to me that any one would probe the secret of my car's construction so as to be able to pursue me in the manner you did. But I had not reckoned without reason on the wooden headedness of Scotland Yard, and I found the provision I had made ample for my purpose."

"And that was ——?" I asked.

"At ten o'clock that night a dinghy put into a little bay about five miles off in answer to a signal flashed from the cliff and took me off to a yacht. I went down into the cabin, dark-haired as you see me now, and next morning I made my appearance on deck with a nice bronze head of hair, moustache, and beard complete, and when a couple of days later I put into Falmouth I went ashore myself in order to buy the papers which gave an account of my destruction."

"It all sounds incredible," I remarked.

"Doesn't it?" he said proudly. "In fact if I had not kept the newspapers I bought at the time I should be tempted to believe that I am the victim of an hallucination. But the fact remains that I am here and that you are here. The impossible has become the inevitable, and I am very much afraid the inevitable for my own protection spells the end so far as you are concerned." He pointed to the water, which had nearly reached my feet. "I cannot give you any longer than the time necessary to allow the water to reach to your feet. By stretching out your legs you can accept your

## 32      The Cruise of the Conqueror

fate now, by lifting them you can postpone it for ten minutes or so."

I do not think I shuddered. At least I hope I did not, though I felt uncommonly cold about the region of the spine. But the feeling left me and was succeeded by a warm thrill of anger that any one should so play with my natural desire for life. My nerves steadied at the thought and my muscles set themselves involuntarily as I measured with my eye the distance which separated us. He was too far off for me to be certain that I could reach him before he fired, so I said quietly, "Oh, I am in no particular hurry," and, as I raised my feet slightly, "I think I shall have time for another cigarette." I had thought to draw him within reach by offering him one from my case, and it was my intention to have seized him, and by a sudden jerk to have dragged him with me into the water. But he was too wary, refusing my offer with a gesture and merely remarking, "Please yourself by all means."

I lit my cigarette and for a moment sat watching the water in silence. It seemed to fascinate me, it rose so rapidly. Already if I were to let my feet dangle loosely at the full length of my legs I knew that my time had come.

Mannering broke the silence with "Any message for Evie, Sutgrove?"

If anything had been wanting to pull me together it was the tone in which he asked this question. Its veiled malice set my blood boiling. Hitherto during this strange interview I had been thinking mainly

about myself, of the hardship of being cut off from those dear to me without one word of farewell, but now I realized that a worse thing might happen; that my wife would be left at the mercy of one whose audacity was only equalled by his resourcefulness, without knowledge of the danger which threatened her.

"Curse you!" I said between my teeth.

"Curse away," he replied, airily. "What can your curses avail? To-morrow morning Mrs. Sutgrove will possibly awaken to the fact that she is a widow, and sometime or other, sooner rather than later, I shall find it my pleasant duty to console her."

I made a movement to rise and he levelled his pistol at my head. "The moment you move, I fire," he said, and I saw that my opportunity had not yet arrived.

"You surely do not think I have forgotten," he continued. "I am not the type of man who forgets easily. For the past few minutes you have been enduring a short taste of the hell into which you plunged me for months and years."

"And into which you will one day plunge for all eternity," I interpolated.

"The man who fears the future is a coward in the present," he answered disdainfully. "But if there is any future existence, and that future existence includes any knowledge of what is happening here, I think hell will be the only method of describing what you will be feeling."

"Indeed," I said, "don't make too sure." The sound I had listened for so eagerly, the sound of approach-

## 34      The Cruise of the Conqueror

ing footsteps, came to my ears, and I spoke loudly to drown the sound. But Mannering heard them, too, and half-turned his head. The opportunity I had watched for had come at last. I sprang straight for him, and as he fired I was near enough to knock up his arm.

My blow was so well judged that the revolver flew from his grasp and a moment later I grappled with him. I got him by the arm and throat before he could recover his equilibrium. I heard heavy footsteps on the stairs, and a patter of further footsteps approaching on the pier, and I shouted aloud for help. Then strong hands gripped me from behind and tore me from my prey. The next moment I felt myself flying through the air to plunge deeply into the sea.

## CHAPTER IV.

### OF THE LIVING WHO BECAME AS DEAD

MY thoughts as I performed my involuntary header into the sea were not precisely such as I should care to set down on paper. The consciousness of being plucked away from my enemy at the very moment when I held him practically at my mercy filled me with uncontrollable rage. For an hour he had been amusing himself at my expense, and then just as my opportunity had come, when my hand was at his throat — I do not fancy if left to myself that my grip would have relaxed until I had squeezed the life out of him — to be torn away and cast aside like an old glove was surely sufficient to make any man think thoughts he would not afterwards reproduce in print.

But cold water has a remarkably sedative effect upon the emotions. When I came to the surface my mood had undergone a sudden change. I had time to realize that two armed men in a motor-boat were more than a match for a single man in the water, particularly when the latter was encumbered with his clothing, and I resolved to allow my personal safety to take precedence of my desire for revenge. Fortunately Mannering and his companion had little leisure to de-



vote to me, for, as I had gone in all of a heap, I rose to the surface with salt water in my eyes and nose and mouth, and I spluttered round, gasping and coughing in a fashion which would have sufficiently betrayed my whereabouts. As it happened, however, they were busily employed in securing their own safety, as I could plainly perceive directly I had got the salt out of my eyes, for on looking towards the pier I observed the *Conqueror* sheer off just as a number of men tumbled pell-mell down the steps on to the landing-stage.

I was only ten or a dozen yards away, and I immediately struck out in their direction, with a vigorous shout to them to prevent the escape of the pirate boat. I only shouted once, for as I opened my mouth for a second warning a wave took me full in the face, and I perforce swallowed my own words together with a plentiful draught of sea water. Half a dozen strokes took me to the landing-stage, where I could see my arrival was expected, and the moment I raised my hand to clutch the edge one of the newcomers bent down to assist me. Even as he caught me by the wrist he remarked — the voice was well known to me: "We have managed to get one of them, anyway."

As I struggled on to the stage, in spite of my dripping condition, I could not forbear breaking into laughter at being mistaken for one of Mannering's crew. Clearly that was what I was adjudged to be, for no sooner was I erect on the landing-stage than a second man gripped me by the arm, while the first remarked pleasantly, "I am glad to see you in such

## The Living Who Became as Dead 37

good spirits, my friend. If there is one thing I hate it is a melancholy prisoner."

"Why shouldn't I laugh, Forrest?" I remarked quietly.

The start the detective gave as I mentioned his name nearly tumbled me into the water again. Then he dragged me forward a few paces to a spot where the light from one of the lamps on the pier shone full on my face, and, dropping my arm, he rubbed his eyes with his hand, and said, "I'm d——d if it isn't Sutgrove!"

"Yes," I said, "and if you knew who has just gone off in that motor-boat you would not have wasted a single second in capturing me, old fellow."

"It really is Sutgrove," he repeated, as if the sight of my face had completely staggered him. The next moment he seemed to entirely recover the use of his faculties. "Come," he remarked to his companions, "this is not one of the people we are after. We must stop that boat at all costs. You will excuse me, Sutgrove," he continued, turning to me, "but I made sure you belonged to the craft which has just put off, and I badly want to get hold of some one belonging to her. I must get a tug to go after her at once."

"A tug!" I answered. "Listen!"

Only a few seconds had elapsed since I had been pulled out of the water, but the *Conqueror* was out of sight and, as we hearkened, the faint purring of her screws grew gradually less and less until it sank into nothingness.

## 38      The Cruise of the Conqueror

"A tug is no use," I said to the inspector. "Let me tell you that there is no boat afloat which can catch the *Conqueror* on a sea like this. Forty knots an hour is the pace she was travelling to-day in the race, for I timed her myself, and the fastest destroyer in his Majesty's navy would chase her in vain."

Forrest stamped his foot in vexation. "It is most important," he said shortly.

"More important than even you think," I replied.

"Why, what do you know about her?" he asked.

"You hardly expect me to tell you the story while I'm in this condition," I answered, squeezing the water out of my coat tails; "but if you will come up to the Lord Warden, the moment I have changed I think I can give you some information which will open your eyes."

"Cannot you tell me now?" he persisted.

I glanced at his companions. He was accompanied by a couple of constables in uniform and a couple of the pier officials. I hesitated. I was not quite certain that it would be desirable for the identity of the Pirate to be disclosed. It suddenly occurred to me that Manning might have channels through which information would reach him, and that, if so, it might be as well that he should think himself secure from identification as the Motor Pirate, whose exploits had once created a reign of terror on land. In order that this end might be secured it would be necessary that my escape should not be made known. I turned to Forrest.

"Look here," I said. "Can you trust me absolutely

## The Living Who Became as Dead 39

for a couple of hours? There is not time for a complete explanation, and I want you to adopt what may seem a curious course of action."

"What is it?" asked Forrest briefly.

"Can you trust your people here to be silent?" I indicated his four companions.

"You are all accustomed to keep a still tongue in your heads, my lads?" he said, and they answered with an assenting murmur.

"Then," said I, "the first thing I want you to do is to find me a place of concealment for twelve or twenty-four hours."

"What the devil ——" began Forrest, and I could tell by his tone that he thought I had taken leave of my senses.

"Stop a moment," I interrupted. "I see I must give you at least one word of explanation. I know the owner of that boat which has disappeared, and he knows that I am aware of his identity — the fact is he tried to finish me in order that I might not be in a position to disclose it. Now if he can only be made to think that his attempt has succeeded, he may possibly be led to place himself in our power."

"Ha!" ejaculated Forrest, and I knew that he had grasped my meaning.

"There is no time to lose," I continued, "for if any one were to recognize me the game would be up at once. I must be hidden immediately. My idea is this. One of you saw me pass on to the landing-stage. You saw nothing of the motor-boat but heard a pistol-shot

## 40      The Cruise of the Conqueror

and arrived to find the stage vacant. Any theory will do to explain my disappearance. An ill-balanced mind — motor mania — call it what you will, led me to commit suicide through losing the race to-day. Directly I am hidden it will be just as well to raise an alarm, and you will search for me."

Forrest chuckled. "You ought to have been in the force, Sutgrove," he remarked. Then he turned to one of the pier officials. "Where can we put him, Dowsell?"

The man thought for a moment before replying slowly, "There's the shed about ten yards down the pier where the paint pots are kept. It's a bit close quarters, but I've got the keys with me."

"The very place," replied Forrest. "Come along."

"One moment," I answered. "You must go and explain the true state of affairs to my wife, Forrest."

The detective looked troubled. "I suppose she must know?" he asked.

"Yes," I said decidedly. Then I took him by the arm and led him aside so that his companions could not hear. "Tell her that it is a matter of life and death. Tell her that Mannering is alive."

Forrest staggered back a pace or two, and again I saw that he was doubtful as to whether I had not been bereft of my reason. "Impossible!" he said. "Impossible! The shock has been too much for you. Your imagination ——"

"Feel my pulse," I said to him grimly, "and tell me if you ever knew it beat more calmly. No, I am

## The Living Who Became as Dead 41

not suffering from any delusion. For an hour this evening I have talked with our old enemy upon this pier, watching every moment for an opportunity to spring at his throat. But there is no time now to tell you the whole story. Come to me the moment you can do so without fear of observation, and I will give you full details."

"But I saw him go over the cliff," he objected.

"If we delay any longer, some one is sure to pass by and recognize me, and it will be impossible to put into practice the plan I have in my mind," I said.

"It is amazing," said Forrest simply as he stepped towards his assistants. "Hurry up, my lads. Let Mr. Sutgrove have your coat, Dowsell, so that if we meet any one on the pier he will not be recognized."

The man stripped off his coat, into which I struggled, and in a group we mounted the steps and hastened towards the little wooden hut only a few yards distant from the head of the stairs. Fortunately the harbour side of the pier was deserted, though there were a number of people gathered on the weather side, enjoying the cool evening breeze, and we reached the hut without attracting attention. The door was speedily unlocked. I stepped into the darkness. The key was turned on me and I was alone, a voluntary prisoner.

It was not exactly an enviable position, but I set to work to make the best of it by divesting myself of my clothes and wringing the water out of them as well as I could in the darkness. Luckily the weather was warm, and, indeed, I soon discovered that my quarters

## 42      The Cruise of the Conqueror

were almost unpleasantly close, for being roofed with corrugated iron, upon which the sun had been blazing all day, the shed was like a drying chamber.

But the events of the evening had made far too great an impression on me to allow of my bestowing much thought on my own comfort. Besides, I needed time to think out the details of the plan which had flashed across my mind. It was fortunate that my old companion in the pursuit of the Pirate had made his appearance so opportunely, and I wondered what had been the reason which had made him so anxious to detain the *Conqueror*, for he had obviously been unaware of the identity of her owner. Had any one but Forrest appeared on the scene there would not have been the slightest chance of carrying into effect the plan I had in my mind, for I should have been compelled to explain my presence on the landing-stage, and the whole story would soon have been given to the world. As it was, if, as I suspected, Mannering was in a position to obtain information of what was going on in the world, I should be in a position to turn the tables on him by means of one of his own tricks. He had been dead for seven years while hatching another of his infernal schemes, and I was quite prepared to remain dead for seven months if I could thereby assist in any degree in laying him by the heels. And the plan in my mind would certainly seem to favour some such result, since one at least of the taunts he had directed at me had revealed an intention which might once more bring him within reach. "To-morrow

## The Living Who Became as Dead 43

morning," he had said, "Mrs. Sutgrove will possibly awaken to the fact that she is a widow, and sometime or another, sooner rather than later, I shall find it my pleasant duty to console her." The taunt had burned itself into my brain. It had been made when I was in his power and when he was satisfied of his ability to silence me for ever. Well, let him imagine that he had so silenced me, and then, when he made the attempt to carry his intention into effect he should find that I, too, could rise from the dead to protect my dear ones. Knowing only too well the remorseless and audacious character of the man, I was certain that he did contemplate some such attempt as he had foreshadowed. I feared for Evie if she should fall into his hands, and I could watch over her safety quite as well if I were for the time, so to speak, non-existent.

Maybe I was wrong in deciding to use my wife as it were as a lure for the bringing of Mannering to retribution. But I could think of no other scheme which promised half so well. There was no one in the whole world who knew him as I knew him, save perhaps Forrest and Evie herself. While he lived and was at large I knew that I should never have a moment's peace of mind, nor, indeed, would my wife. Better, then, any plan which offered the slightest chance of putting a period to his career than mere inactive flight. Such were the arguments by which I strove to justify my adoption of the device that had so suddenly occurred to me, and once having satisfied myself as to the desirability of the course of action I



## 44      The Cruise of the Conqueror

had commenced, I settled down seriously to think out the details.

While I pondered over these my attention could not fail of being distracted by the sound of passing footsteps on the pier. At first in ones and twos, then in larger numbers, I heard the patter of feet and the murmur of voices as people hurried past my narrow prison. Now and again scraps of their conversation reaching my ears showed me that Forrest had spread abroad the story of my death.

"Owner of the *Mist*, is it?" — "Poor fellow" — "Not much chance of picking him up until the tide turns," were some of the sentences which reached me.

A little later I heard footsteps approaching more slowly, and as they stopped outside the door of the shed I heard Forrest's voice remark, "If you will wait here, Mrs. Sutgrove, I will see that any information is brought to you immediately." The key was inserted in the lock, the bolt shot back, and the next moment I saw my dear wife's face silhouetted in the doorway against the faint light outside. I heard her whisper, "Jim, Jim," and the next moment my arms were round her.

## CHAPTER V.

### I LOSE MY IDENTITY

WHEN Evie and I had — well — disentangled, I noticed that Forrest was not her only companion, and I was not best pleased when I recognized that she was accompanied by the daughter of the owner of the *Challenger*. Not that I had any objection to the young lady personally, but merely that I thought it well that my plans should be in possession of as few people as possible. At any other time I should have been glad enough to welcome Edith Withington, if only for Evie's sake, for though they had only met for the first time on the occasion of the race for the International Cup, they were already sworn friends. I did not remark upon her presence, however, if only for the reason that it was not safe to indulge in conversation without risking discovery.

So for a couple of hours at least we stood in silence, Evie, Miss Withington, and Forrest at the door of the shed and I behind them in the black shadow, watching the boats which were skimming the harbour in their search for my body. A hundred questions were burning our tongues, but until the pier was clear none of us could satisfy our curiosity. A hundred times I cursed

## 46      The Cruise of the Conqueror

the people whose morbid delight in the gruesome kept them from their beds to gaze persistently into the waves, long after the boatmen engaged in the search had given it up as hopeless.

Meanwhile one more had been added to our party. I had observed Sanders hurrying along the pier, half of an unlighted cigar stuck in the corner of his mouth, and I had whispered to Evie to stop him. His attitude, when she did so, would have won my eternal regard, even had not many an action afterwards proved him to be one of the most faithful of comrades.

Directly he caught sight of my wife he stopped, and with his face all puckered up with emotion he cried out as he grasped her little hands in his two oily palms, "My puir lady! God help ye an' the sweet bairn."

His words were so unaffectedly honest, so evidently from his heart, that I felt ashamed of having evoked such an expression of feeling under false pretences, and with difficulty I restrained myself from springing forward and revealing myself forthwith. As for Evie she gave a little sob and could say nothing.

It was Forrest who came to the rescue at this moment of tension, for clapping Sanders on the back he remarked, "Mrs. Sutgrove has not quite lost hope yet, Mr. —"

"Mr. Sanders is the engineer of the *Mist*," said Evie in a voice which trembled between laughter and tears, "and was with him in the race to-day."

"Mr. Sanders will yet, I hope, accompany Mr. Sutgrove in a good many more races," said Forrest quietly,

yet with a significance that made Sanders's lips screw up until the end of the cigar in his mouth brushed his eyelashes.

"Who is this gentleman?" he demanded abruptly.

"This is Inspector Forrest of Scotland Yard, a very old friend of my husband's," answered Evie.

"Humph! I've no great opeenion of Scotland Yard myself," grunted the engineer.

"Still," remarked Forrest, "you must take my word that Mr. Sutgrove will need the assistance of the *Mist* and of the *Mist's* engineer within the next twelve hours or less."

"Eh!" ejaculated Sanders. "Eh! Then the puir body's not dead? What for is all this pother you are making?"

The expression on his face as he looked from one to the other was comical in the extreme.

"We are going to let you into a great secret," said Forrest hurriedly, "but you must wait for details; all I can tell you now is that Mr. Sutgrove is alive and well — hush!" He stopped the exclamation which was on the tip of the engineer's tongue with his hand — "There are important reasons for nobody but ourselves knowing the fact. He is alive to a few of his friends, but dead to the world."

Deliberately Sanders removed the cigar from his mouth and looking at the end remarked, "Ma smoke is aye gone oot." Then he tossed the stump into the sea with an expression of such unfeigned disgust that I could not resist a laugh, though I stifled it the next

## 48      The Cruise of the Conqueror

moment. But the sound reached his ears, and brushing his way past my wife, he thrust his hand into the darkness which sheltered me while he whispered in a gruff voice, "Let's feel the grip o' your fist, Mr. Sutgrove, for I no can credit the stories o' the weemen folk, nor the blether o' the detectives."

My hand met his for a moment in a grip which made me wish he had been at my side when Mannering's companion had come to my enemy's assistance. Then he withdrew to the outer side of the shed and remained there talking in whispers with Forrest, until at last the pier was deserted by all but our own little group.

Midnight had passed before this welcome opportunity arrived, and the moment the last of the stragglers disappeared from sight I turned eagerly to Forrest. "What in the world brought you down here in the very nick of time?" I asked.

"Your story first," he answered; and from past experience I knew that I should not find my curiosity satisfied until he had been told all. So begging a cigarette from him — my own were soaked through with sea water — I narrated the events of the night, Forrest insisting upon being supplied with every detail. He was quick to grasp the reason of my action when I mentioned what Mannering had said in regard to Evie, and turning to my wife he remarked, "You must not be afraid, Mrs. Sutgrove; between us we can manage to protect you."

Evie's hand was resting in mine, and I am proud to think that not a single tremor gave evidence of any

anxiety. "I am seven years older than when I last met Mr. Mannering," she answered, "and I have been getting stronger all the time. I am not afraid of him now."

Then Miss Withington spoke. She had been listening intently during my recital, and now quite eagerly she remarked, "You must allow me to enlist my father in the ranks of your protectors, Evie."

Evie looked at me, and Forrest frowned.

She continued still more eagerly, turning to me. "Don't you see that Evie will have to play at being the desolate widow, overwhelmed with grief at this sad calamity; and it would be a tremendous strain upon her if she had to do so in private as well as in public. Now, if I am with her, I am sure I can help her to bear her grief, and ——"

"True," remarked Forrest. "Mrs. Sutgrove has a difficult part to play."

That settled it. I thanked the bright American girl, and we began to discuss the details which I had already arranged in my mind. Evie was to remain at Dover for a couple of days with Mr. Withington and Edith, going on afterwards to Salcombe, where I was to join them, proceeding thither in the *Mist*. Sanders was to be my companion, and I was to be rigged out in a disguise with which Forrest would supply me.

It was not until after two o'clock that I was once more left alone, to await impatiently the hour of departure, which Forrest advised should be at the earliest possible moment. I threw myself down on the floor

## 50      The Cruise of the Conqueror

of the shed to try and obtain a few minutes' sleep, but I only tossed about restlessly, and I was thankful when the key once more grated in the lock and I heard Forrest remark briskly: "Now for your toilet, Sutgrove; there's not much time to spare if you want to get away unrecognized."

I blinked as I came out into the dim light of the early dawn, against which the lights on the pier already showed a sickly yellow, and I must have shivered a little, for the detective remarked, "Salt water never gives any one cold, but all the same you will feel more comfortable in these." He handed me as he spoke a change of thick woollen underclothing with a pair of rough serge trousers and jacket. "Grease 'em a bit when you get on board the *Mist*," he advised. "It won't do for them to look as if they had just been reached down from the slop-shop shelf."

I was not long in making the change, and then Forrest once more proved to be a good Samaritan by producing a flask of brandy and handing it to me. I could have hugged him. It was an excellent spirit, and a couple of mouthfuls banished the last trace of the shivery feeling which hung about me. Then he produced a black wig and beard and some sticks of grease paint and set about destroying the last remainder of my identity. "I shouldn't trouble to wash," he remarked, as he finished his rôle, and as I gathered up my discarded clothes he continued, "You had better sink those as soon as you are well away from Dover."

I followed him as he led the way to the landing-

stage, and as we reached the head of the steps the sound of a screw reached my ear, and a moment later the *Mist* emerged from the inner harbour, where she had been berthed, with Sanders at the wheel.

I had been so engrossed in the work in hand that until this moment I had forgotten that Forrest had failed to enlighten me as to the reason which had brought him to Dover in pursuit of the *Conqueror*, and now I asked him the question.

"You will probably find much more in the papers to-day than I can tell you," he replied. "I merely came down on an off chance. It so happened that yesterday morning we received some information at the Yard concerning an act of piracy on the high seas. It seems an improbable story enough, a tale sent by wireless telegraphy of a Castle liner being stopped by a motor-boat. The chief thought the whole thing was a hoax. So, for the matter of that, did I," he admitted. "But there was a description of the boat given, and as it tallied to some extent with the description printed in one of the evening papers of one of the starters in the Cross-Channel race, and as I knew you were down here, and I thought I would like a chat over old times, I decided to run down. I wish now I had used the telegraph," he added regretfully, "but the whole thing seemed too absurd, and the result is that d——d Pirate has wiped my eye again."

"What did he stop the Castle boat for—fun?" I asked.

"If so, he has a very pretty sense of humour," re-



## 52 The Cruise of the Conqueror

plied Forrest, dryly, "for if my information is correct his fun has cost the shippers a quarter of a million bullion, and as much again in rough diamonds."

"Impossible!" I said. "How could he manage it?"

"That's exactly what we all said at the Yard," replied Forrest; "and as to the means adopted, now no more than you do. But since I have learned that our old friend Mannering has had a finger in the pie I am no longer disposed to look upon the story as a hoax."

"No," I answered. "Yet it seems a little suspicious that a tiny motor-boat could hold up a line."

"There will be plenty of details in the papers," said the detective. "The boat was at Plymouth last night, and I'll guarantee the news boys will be shouting the story far and wide before many hours are gone by. Good-bye." He turned out.

We had been standing at the edge of the stage, against which Sanders was steadying himself with a boat-hook.

"I'll be with you again within three days in order to devise a plan which could be there sooner, but I shall have to go now."

"You will look after her — A. S. M. — while I am gone?" I queried anxiously.

"I have already telegraphed Laver," answered, "and I will see that he does not let her get out of his sight."

I shook his hand warmly. "We can trust to Laver," said.

"I shall tell him all we know," said Forrest, "and if once Laver gets within striking distance of Manner-  
ing, I don't think there will be much fight left in the  
Motor Pirate. He owes him a little account for that  
broken arm."

I laughed as I stepped into the boat. Forrest tossed  
my bundle in after me, and in a minute our screws  
were humming merrily as we made for the mouth of  
the harbour, and after clearing it bore away to the  
west.

Gradually the town and the cliffs of Dover faded  
from our view. We did not hurry in our progress.  
The weather was fine and to all appearance settled,  
and I knew that our store of petrol was none too large.  
When I came to examine it, I found that we  
were even than I had anticipated, and it was  
only by using the utmost economy that we man-  
aged to get to Portsmouth, where I knew that I should  
be able to replenish my stock. As it was we did not  
get there until the afternoon, and by that time both  
Sanders and I were keener on filling our own feed-  
tanks than those of the *Mist*, so that when we had sat-  
isfied our hunger and had got the petrol aboard the  
sun was near setting. Then, bethinking myself of the  
newspapers, I made my way to the railway station and  
purchased as many different editions as I could ob-  
tain and after a mere glance at one of them I returned  
to the harbour, where Sanders awaited me. There  
annoyance, I saw that the *Mist* was exciting  
deal of attention, a considerable crowd having

## 54      The Cruise of the Conqueror

to stare at her. So we once more embarked and ran her over to Ryde, where I thought we should be less likely to attract notice. My anticipations proved correct. We berthed the *Mist* and reached our hotel without exciting any particular signs of public interest, and there, as I seated myself in an unoccupied smoking-room, I felt suddenly so weary that I knew the papers would have to contain some particularly interesting news if they were to keep me awake.

They did. Once again the whole of the press of the United Kingdom had devoted itself to detailing the exploits of a Motor Pirate. Yet, as I was glad to see, nowhere was there any identification of him with his predecessor, though, of course, there were frequent references to him, and in the later editions a good deal of prominence was given to the fact of my disappearance and presumed suicide after being beaten by the *Conqueror*. But here, perhaps, it would be better to give the story of Mannering's first piratical exploit on the high seas.

## CHAPTER VI.

### IN WHICH THE PIRATE HOLDS UP THE DUNSTER CASTLE

THERE was so much of surmise, however, mixed up with the solid ounce of facts in the newspaper accounts of the holding up of the *Dunster Castle*, that I have thought it best to compile a version of the story for myself, instead of depending upon the report of any one paper in particular. Later on, of course, very full accounts of this extraordinary act of piracy appeared in all directions, and everybody on board had an opportunity of airing their experiences at considerable length. But the majority of these were not of abiding interest, and I have left them enshrined in the columns where they first appeared.

It seemed that the first intimation to the captain of the liner that an attempt to relieve him of his valuable cargo was afoot, had been on his arrival at Funchal in order to pick up some passengers and mails. Up to that time the *Dunster Castle*, the latest mail-ship of the Union-Castle line, a magnificent vessel of 14,000 tons, had made a speedy passage. She carried a full complement of passengers, for business was brisk at the Cape, and a large number of people were passing to

and fro. There was not the slightest reason for apprehending that anything would be likely to occur to mar a pleasant voyage.

But, amongst the letters awaiting the arrival of the *Dunster Castle*, was one addressed to the captain, of such an extraordinary nature that the worthy gentleman could only conceive it to be the work of a practical joker or a madman. Indeed, who in this twentieth century, being the recipient of the following epistle, would be disposed to pay the slightest attention to it? The letter was undated and read as follows:—

“The commander of the motor-boat, the *Conqueror*, presents his compliments to the captain of the *Dunster Castle*, and begs to inform him that he proposes to speak him when the *Dunster Castle* arrives at or about lat. 43° N. The commander of the *Conqueror* further desires to explain that his object in doing so is as follows: He has found himself lately to be somewhat straitened in his means, and, understanding that the captain of the *Dunster Castle* has a large amount of bullion and diamonds on board, he is desirous of relieving him of any further responsibility in connection with that portion of his cargo. With this object he would suggest that the captain of the *Dunster Castle* should make arrangements for transferring the said valuables to the *Conqueror*. Any delay and any inconvenience to the passengers of the *Dunster Castle* would be obviated by the packing of the gold and stones in the ship's boats, which could be conveniently cast adrift when the *Conqueror* is sighted, though without

any crew on board, as the *Conqueror* has no accommodation for prisoners. The commander of the *Conqueror* would further like to add that, having in his possession full particulars of the valuables aboard the *Dunster Castle*, he must beg that particular attention shall be paid to his desire that the whole of the treasure shall be dealt with as he has directed, and he thinks that perhaps it will be as well for him to mention the fact that he would not have proffered the request, unless he had the means at his command to ensure that it would be complied with."

When the captain of the *Dunster Castle* read this remarkable missive he indulged in a hearty laugh, and looked upon it as a valuable asset for dinner-table conversation. Nor was he disappointed. The letter produced considerable merriment. The idea of a Castle liner being held up and robbed by a motor-boat seemed the merest nonsense to everybody. Nevertheless, when some forty hours after leaving Madeira the *Dunster Castle* approached the forty-third parallel, the passengers were quite curious enough to turn out on deck in a body to see whether the commander of the *Conqueror* intended to keep his promise, though the general opinion of the likelihood of anything of the sort happening may be gauged from the fact that, amongst the sporting section of the passengers, bets of twenty to one were freely offered against the motor-boat making her appearance, without the odds finding a single taker.

It was somewhat of a shock to the general impres-

## 58      The Cruise of the Conqueror

sion, therefore, when just after three o'clock in the afternoon a cry of "boat ahead" came from the lips of the man on the lookout. The day was bright but not very clear, and the first glimpse of her was due to the reflection of a sun-ray from her golden prow as she was lifted on the crest of a wave, when not more than a mile ahead, right in the steamer's track. A mile is not much to a liner going at full speed, and the passengers were soon able to obtain a full view of the stranger, which appeared to be quietly awaiting the approach of the steamship.

"One of the new-fangled stink-pots wanting to show off," remarked the captain, with the contempt natural to the commander of a royal mail-boat for the skipper of a toy pleasure craft.

"You have not loaded up the bullion, then?" sang out a cheery voice, and the captain smiled knowingly as he replied, "Judging from the look of her, she has just about as much gold about her already as she can conveniently carry."

The captain joined his first officer on the bridge, and when the *Dunster Castle* had drawn near enough to the *Conqueror* to see that the latter was manned by only two men, a roar of laughter broke out at the idea of the big ship being plundered by so sparsely manned and fragile a craft. But before it had died away the first officer, who had been scanning the boat closely through his glass, turned to the captain. "What's that he has mounted aft, sir? I can't quite make out whether it is a gun or a torpedo tube."

"What?" said the captain, sharply, as he took the glass from his subordinate. He looked long and carefully at the *Conqueror*, and when he dropped the glass his face wore a puzzled expression.

"I don't know what to think," he answered.

"Supposing that note you received was not intended for a practical joke," continued the first officer.

The captain made no reply.

"If the beggar should happen to have a torpedo aboard," he added.

"Damnation!" said the captain. "What a croaker you are. He would never dare ——" but he was obviously uneasy.

Nearer and nearer drew the liner, until it seemed as if the tiny boat was inviting the big ship to run her down.

"If he does not move soon," said the captain, "his fate will be his own seeking. After that note, I will not alter my course by half a point."

Even as he spoke the *Conqueror* shot out of the way, and the liner swept past. The captain laughed. "He's like a small boy playing last across the road in front of a motor-car," he remarked. "He will play that game once too often one of these days."

The *Conqueror* had sheered off to half a cable's length, and then the whole of those aboard the liner had an ocular demonstration of her wonderful speed, for, going about almost within her own length, she circled twice round the *Dunster Castle*, like a swordfish round a whale. It must have been a very pretty ex-



## 60      The Cruise of the Conqueror

hibition of the motor-boat's capabilities, and I can quite understand the unanimous chorus of astonishment and admiration which arose from the passengers who watched the manœuvre.

"She ~~has~~ the heels of us, anyway," commented the mate.

"And now he is going to brag of it," remarked the captain as the *Conqueror*, apparently satisfied with the demonstration of her abilities, drew up alongside until a biscuit might have been thrown aboard, and one of the two men on the motor-boat, placing his hands trumpet fashion to his mouth, shouted, "*Dunster Castle* ahoy."

The captain walked leisurely to the port side of the bridge before replying with the query, "What boat is that?"

Clear to every ear on deck came the answer, "The *Conqueror*. Did you get my letter, captain?"

"I have received a letter from some idiot, which I shall now consider it to be my duty to lay before the Board of Trade," replied the captain sourly, for he had been piqued by the manner in which the motor-boat had played round his ship, and the audible admiration of the passengers.

"Please yourself as to that, by all means," replied the commander of the *Conqueror*. "Though whether you have an opportunity of making such a report depends very much upon what efforts you make to carry out my instructions."

"Your instructions be d——d," roared out the cap-

tain. "Do you imagine that I have taken leave of my senses?"

"I hope not," came the cool answer. "I am rather of opinion that the exercise of your intelligence will lead you to consider that the safety of your ship and passengers is of more importance than the retention on board of a certain amount of filthy lucre."

The captain regained his self-control and spoke banteringly. "A very pretty theory, Mr. Conqueror, but I have no intention of jeopardizing the one or parting with the other. I'm too old a bird to be caught by that sort of chaff."

There was a moment's pause, and then the voice of the stranger was raised menacingly. "I must request you to at once heave to, sir, or I shall be under the painful necessity of making you."

The captain laughed again, and remarking, "It won't do, you can't bamboozle me," turned on his heel and walked to the centre of the bridge as if he had dismissed the matter from his mind.

"It really was a very pretty attempt at bluff," he remarked to his first officer. And, indeed, it seemed as if his estimate of the situation had been the correct one, for the *Conqueror* altered her course and stood away until she had put a cable's length between herself and the *Dunster Castle*. How mistaken was this view was speedily demonstrated. The passengers who were watching, saw the second occupant of the little craft go aft and remove a tarpaulin from an object which revealed itself to be a gun. They saw the boat swing

## 62      The Cruise of the Conqueror

round, they observed the gunner train his weapon carefully. There was a slight report, a momentary whistling in the air followed by a louder report, and a jar which made the whole ship quiver. Then the next moment there arose from the engine-room the cries of men and the clangour of steel rods beating on broken metal.

Until the very moment of the second report there had not been a single person aboard the *Dunster Castle* who had not considered the matter in the light of a joke which some mad-brained individual was attempting to play at the expense of the captain. The idea of so tiny a craft being able to inflict any real damage appeared preposterous. Even the training of the gun upon the ship only seemed a part of the comedy being enacted for their amusement, for the gun appeared to be little, if any, bigger than the *Dunster Castle's* signal gun. But at the sound of the result of the shot there was a complete change. The passengers' faces must have proved a ludicrous sight as fear followed close upon and chased away their laughter. In a moment consternation reigned in the place of security. As if fascinated, every eye was turned on the tiny craft, which once more fell away from its course while the gunner trained his weapon and discharged a second projectile at the huge mark offered by the helpless liner, like the first to crash through her unarmoured side and take effect in her very vitals.

This time the effect was still more disastrous than on the first occasion. The whole ship shuddered, the

screw ceased to revolve, and, while the ship fell sharply away from her course, the clang of metal and the hiss of escaping steam from below told of serious damage.

There seemed to be no doubt now as to the Pirate's intention, and as the knowledge came home to the minds of those aboard, small wonder was it that confusion, almost panic, seized hold of the passengers who a few moments before had been laughing so gaily. But this was only momentary. With a few brief words the boats' crews had been ordered to their stations and preparations were being made for leaving the ship.

While these arrangements were in progress the pirate boat had once more ranged alongside to port, and as her commander again hailed the *Dunster Castle* every ear was strained, far more anxiously than on the first occasion, to hear what passed.

Something very like a universal shudder shook the frames of the majority of the passengers as they heard Mannering—the commander of the *Conqueror* could have been none other than he—ask coolly, “Well, captain, have you decided which it is to be? Do you choose to accept my instructions, or must I sink your ship for you?”

The captain groaned. “If only we had one three-pound quick-firer,” he muttered to ‘he mate.

“We haven’t,” answered the first officer shortly.

“I cannot give you above another minute to decide,” shouted Mannering peremptorily.

“You are fully aware of all the consequences of your action, sir?” demanded the captain.

## 64      The Cruise of the Conqueror

The Pirate laughed. "Absolutely," he answered. "So fully aware of them that I swear to you, that if the treasure you carry is not put aboard the boats within the next half-hour, I will sink the *Dunster Castle* and make an end of every man, woman, and child aboard her."

I do not think that I should have liked to have been placed in the position to make the choice which at this moment confronted the captain of the *Dunster Castle*. There can be no doubt in which direction his own inclination would have led him. Better far in his view would it have been to defy the Pirate and go down with his ship, true to the instincts of his nation and his profession. But he was not in a position to follow his own inclination. There were first of all the passengers to be considered; and however hard it was to surrender to his tiny adversary and hand over to him the treasure entrusted to his charge, their safety was of necessity his first consideration. He made a gesture of acceptance; and then followed an example of Mannering's audacity of which I should never have deemed him capable, accustomed as I had been in the past to his cool daring. "Let down your ladder," he shouted, "I am coming aboard."

## CHAPTER VII.

### CONCERNING THE FRUITS OF A PIRATE'S PHILOSOPHY

I MUST confess that I should have liked to have been present on the deck of the *Dunster Castle* when Man-nering stepped aboard. By all accounts he was as cool and collected, possibly more so, than the majority of those who had the opportunity of looking upon his face, and it was said that he bore himself as easily as if he had been a welcome visitor. Indeed, as he passed a group of lady passengers on his way to the bridge where the captain awaited him, he raised his cap and paused to apologize for the fright he had been compelled to give them.

"You have seen," he remarked, "one of the consequences of despising your adversary. Merely because I was the commander of an eighty-foot motor-boat your worthy captain thought he could safely disregard the request which I had made of him in the most courteous terms, with the result that I am afraid I must have given you all a most unpleasant shock. Nothing, I can assure you, was further from my desire." Then, bowing again, he passed on.

And here let me describe him at this moment of his career.

Nothing could have been more unlike the popular conception of a pirate. He had doffed his oilskins before he left the *Conqueror*, and with clean linen, brightly polished boots, and a coat which had obviously been cut by a naval tailor, he was as nattily attired as a yachtsman at Cowes. His naturally dark skin had been tanned a deeper tint by the sun, and his neatly trimmed hair, now turning gray, gave him quite a distinguished air—in keeping with his well-modelled features. He was clean shaved, except for the dark moustache, which served to conceal the worst point in his face—the thin-lipped mouth, closely shut in an even line. In fact, the general verdict was that he was a handsomer specimen of a man than—on this voyage, at least—had been seen on board the *Dunster Castle*.

His politeness was not reserved for the ladies, however. As he approached the captain of the liner he saluted with due formality, and again expressed his regret at being the cause of so much inconvenience.

His victim smiled somewhat sourly as he remarked, "I wonder you are not afraid to trust yourself on board."

"Really, I don't know why I should have any cause for fear," he replied airily. "I happen to have left a very trustworthy man aboard my boat yonder." He pointed to the *Conqueror*, which had dropped astern and now lay rocking lightly on the waves a chain's length away. "I left him instructions that if anything were to happen to me he should exact a speedy

revenge, and I know enough of him to rest assured that he would fulfil my wishes."

"All the same, I don't see how that would benefit you," remarked the captain of the liner.

"I quite agree with you," replied Mannering nonchalantly, as he produced a cigarette-case from his pocket, and striking a match on his boot inhaled a whiff of the tobacco before continuing. "Neither would you benefit to any appreciable degree. You see, you are not aware of the circumstances which have compelled me to this course of procedure or you would be also aware that, as for all practical purposes in modern life I am already non-existent, it matters very little to me at what moment I become so in reality. That's where I have the advantage of you in an argument of this sort. You set some value upon the trivial existence you term life. I set none."

Whether the captain of the *Dunster Castle* had entertained any hope of securing the person of his conqueror I do not know, but if he had I fancy Mannering's demeanour must have made him feel the futility of making any such attempt at the moment, for he growled out with an oath, "An argument like that gun of yours has a great deal more effect upon me than any other you could bring forward."

Mannering laughed pleasantly. "A very effective little toy, isn't it?" he asked. "I'm very proud of it, especially as the whole of the mechanism, together with the explosive I use in the shell, are of my own invention. Of course," he corrected, "I don't mean



## 68      The Cruise of the Conqueror

to assert that I am the first man to make use of a pneumatic gun, but merely to say that this one has points of my own devising in its construction which render it particularly useful for its present purpose."

The captain could only stare at his visitor. He had nothing to say, and it was left for Mannering to resume the conversation.

"I did not come aboard, however," he remarked after a few more puffs at his cigarette, "to discuss modern gunnery, but merely to see that my instructions in regard to the transshipment of your freight are carried out in accordance with my desires. If you will give your orders, captain, I will check the packages as they are placed aboard the boats."

The captain looked north, south, east, and west, but he saw nothing which gave him any hope of relief, and with stiffly compressed lips he issued the most distasteful orders which perhaps it had ever fallen to his lot to give during the whole of his existence.

While he was doing so there occurred one of those ludicrous interludes without which no tragedy is ever quite complete. Amongst the saloon passengers were a number of South African magnates, one of them being the managing director of the mining company which had shipped the parcel of diamonds that Mannering had demanded. No sooner had the purser, in pursuance of the captain's instructions, brought the packet from below than this individual made a frantic rush for the bridge. He had borne the shock of the attack upon the steamship without turning a hair, but

## Fruits of a Pirate's Philosophy 69

the sight of his property passing from his possession proved too much for him.

He was a short, fat, sleek little gentleman of typically Semitic appearance, and he scrambled up beside the captain and with fierce gesticulation made his protest against being plundered.

"It's sheer robbery," he shrieked, his voice rising to a high falsetto, "barefaced robbery of 'elpless, 'armless widows and orphans, who have done nothin' to deserve it."

I can fancy Mannering's smile as he heard the outburst and replied, "Are you one of the said orphans, for, if so, you look prosperous enough to be able to bear the loss?"

"Prosperous?" wailed the little Hebrew. "Prosperous? What shall I be worth when you have robbed me of my property? There's all the washings of the past six months there in your hand, and you are going to rob me of the whole of it. Fifty thousand pounds I've put in the company, and I shall be ruined, ab — so — lute — ly ruined."

"Surely you will not suffer," said Mannering. "The loss will fall on the underwriters."

"You don't understand," wailed the unhappy man. "I — I was bringing them over myself, and I — didn't insure them."

"I suppose in point of fact you thought the risk was so small that you might as well pocket the insurance yourself?"

The abject misery in the diamond merchant's face

showed that the Pirate had guessed the true state of affairs, though the little man only reiterated his moan that he would be ruined.

"Oh, don't say that," replied Mannering. "There must be plenty more where these came from. All you have to do is to spend another six months in further washing. You must look upon this as a mere temporary inconvenience."

The managing director changed his tone to one of appeal.

"I haven't done nothin' to you," he pleaded. "Why should you want to ruin me? There's plenty of people in the world richer than I am, who I'm sure wouldn't mind being robbed. Now look here, Mr. Conqueror, supposin' we could come to some arrangement about this little affair. Rough diamonds aren't no sort of use to a gentleman in your position. You'll never be able to put them on the market, and if I was to make it a matter of business ——" He looked eagerly at Mannering's face to see what sort of effect he was producing, and he must have been satisfied with what he saw there, for he sidled up closely to him and laid his hand on the Pirate's arm. "I'll tell you what I'll do," he said in a confidential tone. "Supposin' I give you a bill at three months for a thousand pounds."

Mannering laughed aloud.

"I'll make it two thousand! Three thousand! Twenty thousand!"

"And what chance would there be of the bill being met?" asked Mannering.

"I give you my oath," replied the Jew eagerly.

"I much prefer the stones," said Mannering.

The unhappy little man became almost inarticulate in his desire to save the treasure. He turned to the captain of the *Dunster Castle*. "I shall hold you responsible, captain. You have given away my property and the property of my shareholders to a man who is in your power, and your company will have to make my loss good. I tell you, you will all have to suffer for it." Then he turned again on Mannering, "You — you — you infernal thief! You — you — you —" He could no longer find a word to express his rage, and he literally foamed at the mouth.

Mannering turned on his heel and quietly remarked to the captain of the liner, "Now, if you please, we will see that the gold is properly packed aboard."

But the little Jew could no longer restrain his despair and he made a spring at the Pirate's throat. It was an absurd act on his part, and the captain of the *Dunster Castle* at once stepped forward to prevent any injury being done to the man on whose life the safety of the ship and the lives of the passengers depended. But there was no need for his intervention. Even as he sprang, Mannering had caught his assailant in the grip which I had myself experienced, and, lifting him from his feet, hurled him from the bridge upon the deckhouse below, where he lay a helpless mass.

A flash of ferocity passed over Mannering's face, but the next moment it disappeared, and it was with

## 72      The Cruise of the Conqueror

a smile he turned to the captain and remarked, "If I was in command of the *Dunster Castle* I should stick to the general rule of refusing to allow passengers on the bridge."

"Since you came aboard, sir," said the captain, "I have ceased to command this ship."

"Then I must apologize for having caused you this annoyance," answered Mannering sarcastically, and, dismissing the subject, continued, "I suppose I may ask you to give me your company while I check the cargo. I see your men are already putting the gold on board the boats." Without a word the captain followed him down the ladder to the deck, where men were busily engaged in the work of removal.

If looks could have killed, Mannering would not have had a long shrift, but, taking no notice of his surroundings, the Pirate remained until the cargo in the boats had been arranged to his satisfaction. The first boat was lowered safely, and, once more saluting the captain, Mannering took his place in the second and gave the signal to lower away with a smile of satisfaction on his face. The sea was calm and the boat took the water with hardly a splash, in spite of its being so deeply laden. Then, in response to a wave of the hand, the *Conqueror* ran up, and Mannering, after fixing the tow-lines with his own hands, took his place in his own craft.

Finally, once more doffing his cap to the passengers who lined the bulwarks of the *Dunster Castle*, he swept

away from the helpless ship, steering a course east by south, almost direct for the Spanish coast.

With the departure of the Pirate there remains little further of interest to relate regarding the experiences of the *Dunster Castle*. For twenty-four hours she wallowed helplessly on the sea, until, by the exertions of the engineers, her engines were patched up sufficiently to enable her to resume her voyage, and, ultimately, she made her way into Plymouth, after a number of minor breakdowns, a couple of days later than she should have arrived at Southampton.

Such was the story of Mannering's first piratical exploit, and it was quite evident that alone it would have been sufficient to awaken wide-spread excitement. But, coming as it did just after the announcement of his winning of the Cross-Channel race, the man's audacity appeared all the more noteworthy, and produced a much greater effect than it would otherwise have done. There was no lack of identification. Both at Calais and Dover a number of people who had seen the owner of the motor-boat were able to give a sufficient description of him to make it certain that he was one with the man who had taken half a million in gold and stones from the hold of the *Dunster Castle*. There could be no mistaking the boat either, as in each case the description tallied exactly.

Under all these circumstances I am afraid that very little notice would have been taken of my own disappearance but for the fact that it was presumably owing to my defeat by the *Conqueror*. As it was, I

## 74      The Cruise of the Conqueror

found that a liberal portion of the space in the newspapers was devoted to the subject, especially in the evening papers, and I eventually retired to my room in considerable trepidation lest my existence should be discovered. Still, my apprehensions on this score did not disturb my sleep. In fact, I slept until ten o'clock the next morning, and I doubt whether I should have awakened then had not Sanders come to my room and pulled me out of bed.

Then as I rubbed the sleep out of my eyes he remarked, "Come, man," — I had forbidden him to make the slightest reference to me by name, — "if ye'll be no makin' for to start soon, we'll never be gettin' away. The whole o' the population of the Island is down on the quay starin' at the *Mist*, an' there's twa deevils of interviewers about."

The only protection I could think of was flight. So with a big tip to the waiter to ensure that we should not be molested, we got our breakfast and, making our way down to the harbour, managed to get aboard the *Mist* before any of the dreaded pressmen put in an appearance, and it was with a light heart that I slipped out of the harbour and steered down the Solent.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### TELLING OF ANOTHER MEETING OF THE MIST WITH THE PIRATE

THE sky was clear and the sea calm when we left Ryde, but we had not been afloat for more than an hour before signs of a change in the weather made their appearance. Out of the southwest there arose one or two swift-scudding dark clouds which were absorbed before they reached the zenith. But these were merely the advance couriers of others. Soon the sky was flecked with clouds which gathered so quickly, coming up from every quarter, that one needed not to be weather-wise to predict a thunder-storm. Yet as the sea remained calm save for an occasional puff of wind which did little more than ruffle the surface of the water the prospect did not worry me. I reckoned that as it was working up from the southwest, and that as we were running right into it, half an hour would see the *Mist* through. So I kept steadily to my course with the engines running at half their maximum power, since I had no desire to make Salcombe Harbour until after dusk, when my arrival would not be observed.

If I had happened to have had a barometer on



board I doubt that I should have so underestimated the potentialities of the storm into the heart of which we were flying. Anyhow in another half-hour I was bitterly regretting that I had not run before it for the nearest harbour. Even before the storm broke I began to realize that it was likely to be more than a mere thunder-storm, for though the surface of the sea was smooth, as we progressed we met a long, even swell which told as clearly as the barometer would have done that there was wind behind it. That was not our first trouble. When, as near as I can judge, we were just about due south of Portland Bill — I had no means of taking our reckoning and could merely guess at our position through having shortly before sighted one of the Jersey boats on its way to Weymouth — the storm broke with a fierce intensity, which, so far as the lightning was concerned, I was pretty well prepared for. But I was not anticipating the accompanying downpour of rain to be of quite so torrential a character as it proved to be. After about ten minutes of the electrical discharges the rain began to fall in big drops, which in a few minutes resolved themselves into veritable sheets. It formed so thick a curtain that I could not see a yard ahead. Fog is troublesome enough, but a downpour such as this was ten times worse than any fog. If anything had happened to be in our way we should have gone plump into it and to the bottom without the slightest chance of avoiding the peril. Nor was this our only danger. The water poured into the cockpit so rapidly that before we realized it the floor

## Another Meeting with the Pirate 77

was awash and I began to fear lest it would get to the motor.

Leaving Sanders to set the pump to work, I turned my attention to making things snug by covering in so much of the open space as I could. Fortunately I was provided with the means. When I had built the *Mist* I had anticipated her occasional exposure to sea, and instead of the usual spray hood I had designed a false deck which would serve to prevent waves breaking aboard and swamping her. Consisting of a double thickness of balloon silk well-rubbered and stretched on stays of bamboo, this contrivance was so light that it made no appreciable difference to our weight, besides being compressible into a comparatively small space. This was the first occasion, however, in which I had found any use for it, and very handy it proved to be, for without it our little pump would never have managed to cope with the flood of water which poured in on us from the sky. But once fitted into position the covering formed a fairly complete protection, and any danger of being swamped was speedily averted.

For twenty minutes the flood continued to descend, then it gradually became less, and I could once more see ahead. But now we were to encounter a fresh peril. It seemed as if the thunder-storm had set loose all the forces of nature, for the moment the rain ceased the wind broke loose, and down from the southeast by east there came a squall which, taking the *Mist* on the port quarter, swung her round until she lay broadside on to it, and held there as immovably as if she were an-

chored. I do not suppose that the squall lasted for more than half a minute, but I do know that every second of the time I expected the boat to turn turtle. Lucky it was for us that I had stretched the covering over her previously, for otherwise she would have been swamped to a certainty, and any further chances I might have had of coming to a final understanding with the Motor Pirate would have been finally dissipated.

But the squall passed, and the *Mist* righting herself, I once more put her on her course, and set her going this time at full speed, for, I confess, I had for one day had enough of the sea in so frail a craft. Now, however, with the passing of the squall there came a gusty breeze from the southwest, which seemed every moment to develop in force, and with it the sea began to rise in a very nasty fashion.

"What do you think of it, Sanders?" I asked, turning to my companion.

The engineer was not a man to waste many words, and hitherto, during the progress of the storm, he had hardly said a word. Even now he only remarked, drily, "I've seen waur weather in my time, Mr. Sutgrove, an', doubtless, I shall live to see waur again."

This was comforting, no doubt, but all the same I did not feel too happy at the prospect. Here we were, well out in the Channel, sixty or seventy miles from the point we wished to make, with a head wind and a rising sea to face in a fragile racing-boat. Soon, the sea became too high to permit of our carrying on

## Another Meeting with the Pirate 79

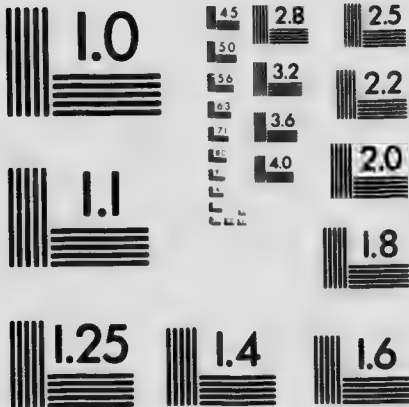
at full speed, for the *Mist*, instead of rising to the waves, driven by her powerful screws, hurled herself at them, and to me it seemed sometimes that we tore our way through them more after the fashion of a submarine than anything else. Reluctantly I lowered our speed to half the maximum, but I found even that eventually too great, for she still tried to cut through instead of to top the waves. As I strove to steer, the sheets of spray which took me full in the face every few minutes, and were only prevented from blinding me by the mask I wore, found their way into the boat through the narrow openings which remained uncovered, and we had to keep the pump going continuously in order to free the *Mist* of the water we shipped. So eventually I dropped to about six or seven knots, and found, although occasionally we got the crest of a wave aboard, that on the whole we progressed fairly comfortably. In fact, I was agreeably surprised to find how buoyant the *Mist* proved to be, and though at times she reared herself almost perpendicularly, until it seemed that she must inevitably turn over, yet she always survived, and I began to feel a wild exhilaration at the battle with the elements.

Of course, I had no time to do anything but pay attention to the steering of the boat. To have let her fall away a couple of points would have inevitably meant destruction, and though now and again as we topped a wave I caught sight of larger craft, none of them came near enough for us to attract their attention. Slowly the afternoon passed until the sun ap-



# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



**APPLIED IMAGE Inc**

1653 East Main Street 14609 USA  
Rochester, New York  
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone  
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

## 80      The Cruise of the Conqueror

proached the horizon, though without making any promise of moderation of the gale. Indeed, what promise there was seemed in precisely the other direction, for though the sky had cleared the sun shone through a pallid sort of mist, and gave only a sickly glare on the sea. Rarely have I seen the sun set over a wilder prospect — nothing but a turbulent field of black and gray waves, up and down whose sides the *Mist* rushed.

It was at this moment that I heard Sanders give an exclamation of surprise.

"What's the matter?" I shouted. "Anything gone wrong with the engines?"

I waited with considerable anxiety for his reply, for if they had broken down I knew that our hope of ever reaching any port again would not have been worth consideration. I was considerably relieved, therefore, when he replied, "No need to fear for them."

"What the deuce were you shouting out about, then?" I asked, irritably.

"Indeed, and I'm sorry to have scared you, Mr. Sutgrove," replied Sanders, drily, "but the fact is, that if that golden tin-toy with the lop-eared blacksmith aboard is not just about a quarter of a mile off on our starboard quarter I've gone either daft, dotty, or silly."

"What?" I shouted. "Do you mean to tell me that Mannering is in pursuit of us? You must be dreaming."

"Maybe," he answered, drily. "But all the same,

## Another Meeting with the Pirate 81

if you will let me take the wheel for a minute or two while you look in the direction I say, you will dream that identical dream yourself."

"Catch hold," I cried to him, and the minute he had taken my place I stood erect, and removing my mask looked eagerly in the direction indicated. The *Mist* was sliding down into the trough of the sea at the moment, and not until she had mounted the crest of the next wave was there a chance of seeing anything. Then I saw that Sanders had not been dreaming, for I beheld the *Conqueror* make her appearance. She had crested a wave at the same moment as the *Mist*, and though her burnished golden plates were clearly visible to us, I doubted whether he had made us out in the smother of foam. Once again we glided into a valley amongst the waves, and I waited impatiently until we had surmounted the oncoming hill for another glimpse of my enemy. But when the *Mist* once more rose to the crest there was nothing of the *Conqueror* to be seen, and when, after three times rising up, I had not caught a single glimpse of her, I began to think that Mannering might at last have met the fate he so richly deserved. But I was soon to be disillusioned. When for the fourth time we mounted a big wave the first object that met my eyes was the *Conqueror*, not a cable's length astern.

She was evidently making much better weather of it than the *Mist* was, and I now saw that Mannering had made preparations for meeting bad weather much superior to mine. I had noticed when at Calais and



## 82      The Cruise of the Conqueror

also at Dover, that the whaleback deck had extended almost to amidships, and that she was also decked in aft more than usual in a racing-boat. Now this protection against the waves had been added to until she was more like in appearance a huge rob-roy canoe than anything else, and by the rate she was travelling I judged that her owner had precious little fear of being swamped.

He must have sighted the *Mist* on the previous occasion when the two boats appeared on the crest of the waves together, for now he was steering a course which would bring him alongside of us, though previously he had been steering a line which would have taken him across our track astern.

"He's coming alongside," I shouted to Sanders. "If he tries to speak keep up the story of my suicide."

"Ye may certainly trust Nat Sanders for that," murmured the engineer reproachfully.

For a few seconds we heard and saw nothing more of the *Conqueror*. Then she burst through the crest of a wave we had but a moment before left behind us, and swept up alongside so closely that at one time I could have touched her.

The foolhardiness of such a reckless approach in such a sea brought my heart to my mouth, and so upset Sanders that he roared out a volley of abuse, which, though undoubtedly deserved by the person to whom it was applied, is quite unprintable.

The abuse, which must in parts at least have reached Mannering's ears, seemed to tickle that gentleman, for

## Another Meeting with the Pirate 83

I could see that his mouth curved in a smile. A moment later he shouted mockingly, "Sorry to have splashed you, *Mist*, though so far as I can see you couldn't get much wetter."

"No thanks to you, you yellow-gilled Spaniard," said Sanders, earnestly. "Why don't you look where you're going? You don't want to sink us, do you?"

This time Mannering laughed aloud. He had slackened his pace and pitched side by side with the *Mist*, bow on to the waves. I sat facing him, and so far as I could tell he had not the faintest suspicion of my identity.

"It doesn't matter much to me whether you sink or swim as you don't appear to have your skipper aboard," he remarked.

"Thank you," bawled Sanders. "If ever there was a good, kind-hearted gentleman, with a first-class cabin reserved for him for his v'yage across the crystal seas, you're that same gentleman."

"That's all right," replied Mannering, pleasantly, "and as you think so highly of me, perhaps you will not mind telling me where Mr. Sutgrove is at the present moment."

"What's the use of speering silly questions like that?" roared out the engineer in an assumed rage. "How should I ken where a dead man is gone?"

"Dead?" said Mannering. "Dead, did you say, or did the wind alter the words?"

"D'ye think I should say dead if I meant he was alive?" retorted Sanders. "What d'ye think I should

## 84      The Cruise of the Conqueror

be doin' out here if Mr. Sutgrove was in the land of the livin'? What for is Mrs. Sutgrove a-greetin' at Dover if she hasna' cause? Pooh, man, you are no so cleever as ye think."

"You surprise me," replied Mannering, but he said no more, and the next moment he sped away and left us.

"Well," asked the engineer of me as he resumed the wheel, "did I answer his questions to your satisfaction?"

"Admirably," I replied, and, indeed, I thought that Sanders's answers could not have been improved upon, for they had been given with exactly the amount of indignant warmth which the occasion required, and without the slightest recognition that the *Conqueror* was anything else than the *Mist's* successful adversary in the Cross-Channel race.

We sighted the *Conqueror* once or twice again during the next few minutes, but the gathering dusk soon hid her, and from the course she was steering we judged that she was running for the Channel Islands. Meanwhile, the wind gave no prospect of dropping, and I began to look anxiously for the light which should show that we were within sight of home, even though I knew that perhaps more dangerous than any of our experiences hitherto would be the attempt to make Salcombe Harbour in such a gale as was now blowing. So we toiled on, until about eleven o'clock I recognized the flash of the Start light and knew that we were at last within measurable distance of home.

## CHAPTER IX.

### CONCERNING SOME OF THE DELIGHTS OF DEATH

WHEN I first sighted the welcome gleam of the Start light it lay, as near as I could judge, a couple of points on my starboard bow. I had evidently steered a wider course than I had intended, and it was by the merest chance that we had not entirely missed the port for which we were bound. But when I came to alter my course by a point, I became aware more fully than I had been before of the ticklish nature of the task before me. Even this slight alteration in our course was sufficient to bring a shower of spray all over the *Mist* from every wave she encountered, and I could see that when it became necessary to put her about in order to make Salcombe Harbour our position would be one of no slight peril. Once on her beam ends, a single sea breaking aboard would swamp her engines and—well the *Mist* would be as evanescent as her namesake.

I explained the matter to Sanders as well as I could in the hurly-burly, and asked him whether he was willing to take the risk. For my own part I had had quite enough of the gale and was quite willing to face the additional peril in the hope of a speedy termination

## 86      The Cruise of the Conqueror

to our trouble. And this view I found to be shared by my engineer.

"We have had nothin' to eat for nigh on twelve hours," he remarked, in a voice which was plaintive in spite of the fact that he had to shout ' words in order that they should reach my ear. " the sooner we are comfortably ashore the better I shall be pleased."

"If we can manage to get there," I replied.

"We shall manage to do that right enough," he answered cheerily, and straightway began to take all possible precautions for our safety by seeing that all the fastenings of the covering of the boat were tight.

For another hour we drove on and then, judging the time had come to make for the harbour, with my heart in my mouth, I shouted to Sanders my intention to go about. The moment I waited for came when, cresting a huge wave, it seemed to me that the water beyond was a trifle less troubled. Setting the engines going at their fullest capacity I swung the *Misti* round in nearly half a circle. For five seconds it was touch and go. As we came broadside on to the sea, the *Misti* was caught by a wave, and it seemed to me that she had gone under, for amidst the smother and the foam I could see nothing. But the next moment she answered to the wheel, and a second later, with the wind now on our port quarter, we were flying for the opening in the big cliffs of the South Devon coast, guarded on the one side by Prawle Point and on the other by Bolt Head. Hitherto I had been afraid to go our fastest for fear of shipping the seas, but now,

in order to avoid the same fate, I found it necessary to let the *Mist* do her best. And nobly she repaid our confidence. Follow they never so swiftly, the waves could not overtake the elusive *Mist*, and another ten minutes had not elapsed before we could hear the crash of the breakers on the rocks as we neared the land.

I guessed I had gauged my course fairly accurately, but all the same it was with profound thankfulness that I saw the lights which marked the channel and knew that the last difficulty we had to encounter would be passed in a very few minutes.

During those few minutes I more than once thought that I would have been thankful to be again in the open sea. Deafened with the roar of the breakers, enveloped in a cloud of spray, tossed hither and thither as the sea boiled in the fairway, several times I thought the *Mist* would vanish for ever on the rocks. But our luck held. We won through at last and none too soon, when as I realized that we were safe within the bar, Sanders announced that one of the engines had ceased to work and I could tell from the coughing of the other that it would not be long before it was in a similar plight.

However, it held out long enough to enable us to run the *Mist* up the estuary to the basin I had originally prepared for her reception, and there, making her fast, we were thankful enough to step ashore.

I do not think I am a sentimentalist, though I am not so sure about Sanders, but the first thing we did on landing was to face each other and shake hands.

Neither of us said a word; there was no need for it, since the grip we each gave the other was far more expressive than anything either of us might have said. Then we staggered up the hilly path which led to the little cottage that Sanders had chosen for his dwelling-place. We were soaking wet from head to foot, our limbs were cramped and stiff, and I at least was so tired that I could have laid down as I was and gone straight off to sleep. Being in this condition it was fortunate for the purposes of my plan that Sanders was somewhat of a misogynist. When on engaging him he had taken a little two-roomed cottage, and declared his intention of fending for himself, because he "disliked a parcel of clatterin' women about him," I had chaffed him a good deal, but now I was only too glad that he had preferred a bachelor establishment to accepting a room at my own house or taking apartments in the little town. Our arrival, I fancied, could not have been remarked, for on our way to his cottage we met no one. Even had we done so I should probably not have been recognized, although I had stuffed the wig with which Forrest had provided me into my pocket, and I knew, even before I looked at my face in the glass, that the buffeting it had undergone would have been sufficient to remove the paint with which the detective had been careful to obliterate my natural complexion.

At the moment, though, I paid little heed to anything. I followed Sanders to his door mechanically, and immediately he had unlocked it I blundered into the cottage and dropped into a chair, and there I re-

mained while he drew the curtains and lighted his lamp, which stood ready trimmed on the table. Nor did I move, until, producing a gallon jar from a cupboard and a couple of tumblers, he half-filled one of the glasses with the amber-coloured contents and handed it to me with the remark, "Milk for babes an' the whiskey for men is food an' drink for both."

I laughed a little stupidly and my hand trembled as I held it out for the tumbler. "Where's the water?" I asked.

"Ye'll no want the water," replied Sanders as he helped himself to a similar dose and tossed it off without so much as a wink. "This is the genuine stuff, none of your English poison, an' after it you'll sleep as sound as if the good old *Mist* had been at the bottom of the Channel with the two of us beside her. The only difference being that maybe ye'll awaken in the mornin'."

I made no further objection, and truth to tell, I no more realized that I was drinking neat spirit than if it had been so much water. Afterwards I had a dim remembrance of stripping off my soddened clothes and wrapping myself in a blanket, and then I was asleep.

The day was well advanced when I awoke, and I wondered for a couple of minutes where I was and what had happened. It was Sanders's voice which ultimately aroused me to a perception of what had befallen as he called out at the open door, "It's ower late for breakfast an' ower early for lunch, but judging



your appetite by my own I will take leave to suggest that we eat the two together."

Then I realized that the good fellow had tumbled me into his own bed and had contented himself with the floor in the outer room, which alone was quite sufficient to account for the fact that he had slept more lightly than I had done. I sprang out of bed to find that my clothes had been carefully dried, though, if he had been able to see them, Forrest would no longer have needed to advise me to take any means to disguise their newness. However, after a wash down, followed by a careful toilet, in which the sticks of paint the detective had left with me played their due part, I got them on and joined the engineer in the second room of the cottage, which served him as kitchen, dining-room, and parlour alike. He had already been at work making ready a substantial breakfast. Porridge, ham, eggs, bread, butter, tea, I did justice to all that he had provided, and when, after I had satisfied my hunger, I lit a cigarette, I began to think that the experience of the previous night was not without redeeming after effects.

When Sanders, too, had finished, lighting his pipe he puffed away with an air of contentment for awhile, surveying me with undisguised amusement.

"Ye'll have to take to a pipe," he remarked, when I tossed the end of the cigarette I was smoking into the fireplace and prepared to light another. "Those twisted little bits of paper are not exactly in character with that get-up."

## Some of the Delights of Death 91

I laughed cheerfully. "Perhaps you are right," I said, "but as I haven't a pipe I shall have to stick to the cigarettes for the present."

"That's a matter which is soon remedied," he replied, "and since there's no time like the present for making alterations, maybe ye would accept the loan of a pipe from myself."

He routed out a villainously juicy old briar from a drawer, and, cramming it full of black plug tobacco, he handed it to me together with a box of matches.

"And now," he remarked, "what's the next move to be?"

I had been considering the question while eating, and I had come to the conclusion that, for the present, there was nothing to be done. Sanders looked tremendously disappointed when I told him my decision, so I asked him whether he had thought I intended going for a cruise in search of the Motor Pirate.

"Well, not preceesely that, perhaps," he answered, "though I had some hopes that good fortune might bring me one day within measurable distance of overhauling that pretty boat of his and asking that ill-favoured engineer belonging to her a few questions."

The opportunity seemed a favourable one for taking him entirely into my confidence, and I revealed to him the hope I entertained that Mannering would fulfil the intention he had formed to "console" my wife. I was fully repaid by the indignation which he expressed.

"Under these circumstances," I continued, "I do not see what I can possibly do, at least until I have

## 92      The Cruise of the Conqueror

consulted with Inspector Forrest. So far as I can see I can only remain quietly at home here and await eventualities."

"Well, I shall only be too delighted to have you as a guest," he remarked.

"Oh! I am not going to quarter myself on you to that extent," I replied. "I think I can manage to live at home without being discovered."

Indeed, my house at Salcombe was admirably suited for the adoption of any such course of action. More than a mile removed from the little town, it stood on the side of a hill in its own grounds, which were so well wooded that it was perfectly screened from observation. I should, I knew, have to take my servants into confidence, but I had no great fear that they would betray it. The housekeeper had known me from a boy, the youngest of the maids had entered our service a few months after our marriage, and I thought that, if they were warned, their discretion might be assured for long enough to serve my turn. Still, I could not make my appearance in my present rig-out, so I sent Sanders up to the house to make inquiries as to when my wife was expected to arrive, while I remained in his cottage and devoted myself with assiduity to the attempt to break myself in to the pipe with which the engineer had presented me.

He returned in about an hour with the information that Evie was expected to arrive that same evening, so I proposed that we should devote the rest of the day to overhauling the *Mist* and once more putting

her into racing trim in view of any possible chance occurring which would enable us to make use of her.

By that time the news of the arrival of the *Mist* in the course of the night had got abroad, and a number of the local gossips had found their way to the landing-stage in order to learn fuller particulars of the mysterious events of the past few days and gaze upon one at least of the actors in them. I was delighted to find that my disguise was effective and that every one took Sanders's word when he described me as a handy man he had picked up at Dover, upon Mrs. Sutgrove's instructions, to assist him in bringing the *Mist* home to Salcombe. I was equally delighted and in no small degree amused, too, by the readiness with which he answered the shoal of questions which were poured upon him. He told me afterwards that he was afraid once or twice that he found it difficult to keep a decently sober expression on his countenance when he had to express his regret at the loss of his employer. "Even if I hadna' liked you, man," he said, "I would have been bound to perjure my immortal soul for the sake of my bread and butter, to say nothing of the whiskey."

For my own part his decorous gravity as he had discussed my perfections and imperfections had seemed to me quite flawless. Never so much as by a twitch of his countenance had he betrayed the fact that the man upon whom he was bestowing the following appreciation was standing by his side.

"A pleasant, well-favoured man ye call him. Well,

## 94      The Cruise of the Conqueror

I'm no for saying as you are altogether wrong, forbye he was an Englishman, an' whether Scot or Englishman it's not looks as will take a man to heaven. As good as he looked, ye say. I've no fault to find with him myself. Mayhap he wasna as joost as Solomon, but he wasna as careful as Melchisidec, and I'll no say as many a man might not have been better spared. For a man who spoiled his whiskey with soda-water I don't think I ever met his equal taken altogether, and if he had not been a bit daft on racing boats, and smoked so many of them paper cigarettes instead of honest tobacco in a pipe, it's my firm belief that he would be in the land of the living at this very moment. But ye can never tell what will happen to a body as puts anything but pure spring water to his whiskey, and ye are no too certain of him if he puts too much of that."

From my experiences on this occasion I have come to the conclusion that it would not be a bad plan if every one had the opportunity of shuffling off their mortality for an hour or two at some period of their lives. I learned something from the gossip of the fishermen and others who had gathered about the *Mist* as we worked, and though I blushed under my paint once or twice, I heard other things which — well, I hope to remember them to my own advantage during what years remain to me. For the whole of the day we had relays of visitors, and I was thankful when night approached and with it the hour when I could return to my own home and resume my own individuality.

## CHAPTER X.

### WE HOLD A COUNCIL OF WAR

THE best tribute paid to my disguise was when I found that my wife failed to recognize me. I was standing with Sanders in the hall when she entered the house, and her glance passed me by with merely a sort of mute interrogation of cursory wonder as to what I was doing there. Sanders, on the contrary, she at once eagerly invited to follow her to the study. I went with him, and as I entered after him, silently twirling my cap in my hand, she remarked, "Cannot you leave your friend outside for a minute or two, Mr. Sanders?"

"What? Evie!" I said.

She recognized my voice, and it was Sanders who stepped outside without waiting to be asked to withdraw either.

We did not keep him there long, however, for after a few hasty inquiries as to the welfare of our child I called him back, at the same time asking Evie to summon the rest of the servants.

Our establishment was not a large one, but when my wife had explained who the unkempt new arrival really was, their exclamations of wonder would have

## 96      The Cruise of the Conqueror

done duty for a much larger gathering. Then I took up the story, and, having extracted pledges of secrecy, I dismissed them to their duties, myself hastening to my dressing-room to resume my own personality before the arrival of our youngster, whom Evie had left in charge of Edith Withington to follow on with the luggage in another carriage, she having preceded them in order to ascertain what my plans were.

Taken altogether we were a very merry party, the dead and the living, who sat down to dinner together that night, though I admit I was a little bit worried when I realized to what I had committed myself if I desired to keep up the fiction of my death. It was not as if I had been a bachelor. To do the thing properly, I soon perceived under my wife's instruction, would necessitate attention to a hundred little details which had never presented themselves to my imagination. There was the question of mourning. For herself Evie declared that she would not don widow's weeds nor put the little one into black, and she declared that she could escape criticism by letting it be known that she was too much grief-stricken to go abroad or to see any one; but the servants would have to be put into mourning, and so on. A hundred trivialities had to be provided against.

I felt inclined to end the farce at that moment, and it was only the knowledge that Forrest had thought well of my idea which determined me to wait at least until I had the opportunity of once again talking the matter over with him.

It was a couple of days before he arrived, however, and by that time we had gone so far that I determined in any event to postpone the date of my resurrection for a month or two. Though I had awaited Forrest's promised arrival with a certain amount of impatience, yet I must confess that the time passed rapidly. One or two visitors could not be denied, and though it was a nuisance to be bundled out of the way while my wife received them in a room carefully darkened in order that the traces of her grief should not be too conspicuous while she listened to their conventional condolences, there was compensation in her relation of the unique experience. Meanwhile Mr. Withington had joined us, having brought his steam-yacht, a handsome and comfortable boat of 250 tons, capable of doing seventeen knots, round from Dover and anchored her in Salcombe Harbour. He joined us in the afternoon of the second day after my wife's arrival, and that same evening Forrest made his promised appearance, dropping in as if he were merely a casual visitor in the neighbourhood.

Thus, our party being complete, on the night of the detective's arrival we gathered in my study for a council of war over our after-dinner coffee and cigars. First I told Forrest and Withington of our meeting with the Pirate in the Channel, and they both listened intently.

Forrest nodded when I had finished. "He was sighted by a French destroyer that same night twenty



## 98      The Cruise of the Conqueror

miles north of Ushant and steering a course almost due south."

"That looks as if he was making for some part of the French coast," I remarked.

"Where Mannering is concerned, the obvious is the last thing he may be counted upon to do," replied Forrest.

"He must have some hiding-place, and it ought not to be difficult to locate it," remarked Withington. "A boat like the *Conqueror* would excite comment anywhere."

"That is just what I thought," said Forrest. "It scarcely seems possible that a boat of so distinctive a character could have been built without exciting remark, but the moment that I began to make inquiry I found that absolutely nothing is known about her. I looked at the original entry for the Cross-Channel race, thinking that I should find some clue to help me. It was all in order, merely a letter written on note-paper stamped with a most gorgeous crest, addressed from Barcelona, signed Juan Davila de Leon, and containing names purporting to be those of the builder of the boat and of the maker of the engines, both of these latter seemingly the names of Barcelona firms."

"That is just what misled us all," I interpolated. "It seemed absurd to think that anything swift could come out of Spain."

"It is quite possible that you are not so far wrong after all," replied the detective. "We have communi-

cated with Barcelona, with the result that we find that nothing is known of any Juan Davila de Leon at the address he gave, nor of either of the firms whose names were mentioned in his letter."

"One would have expected nothing less of Mannering," I said.

"In these days of journalistic enterprise," continued Forrest, "it is practically certain that had the *Conqueror* been built in any well-known yard, or even in any well-known country, some particular, regarding her would have leaked out before this, but so far as I could gather no single eye save that of Mannering and his assistant had rested upon her until she was sighted by the lookout on the *Dunster Castle*."

"Well?" asked Mr. Withington.

"It seems unnecessary almost for me to point out," said the inspector, "that Mannering must have not only built his boat himself, but that he must also have done so in some place which was secure from observation."

"Of his capabilities for doing that sort of thing under the very eyes of those who have made it their business to run him to earth, we have already had an experience in the past," I remarked.

"Just so, confound him!" replied Forrest, "and if we were to be guided absolutely by past experience we should have to look for him somewhere in the Kingsbridge River."

I laughed before I answered decidedly, "No; I'll wager the whole of my possessions that the *Conqueror*

## 100      The Cruise of the Conqueror

has never crossed the Salcombe bar, and as for having been built anywhere on the estuary, it is a flat impossibility."

"I think you would win your wager," said Forrest. "I agree that it would be a sheer impossibility for him to have built it anywhere in England, and it would be still more difficult for him to take his petrol aboard without exciting remark."

"Petrol?" I asked, eagerly.

"Yes," said Forrest. "I learned that he filled up his tanks with petrol at Calais before the race."

"Then we ought not to find it difficult to trace him by discovering the line of his supply," said Withington.

"H—m," grunted Forrest, "Mannering is not likely to have left an open trail for any one to follow. You may depend upon it that he has already either provided himself with a store upon which he can draw for a considerable period or arranged for it reaching him through a channel which will not be easily discoverable. I don't anticipate much result from following up that clue, although it will, of course, be done at once. No, I think I could make a much better guess at his whereabouts if I knew a little more about the construction of his boat. If it were possible to get anywhere near the correct details as to how far his petrol would carry him we might be able to limit the space in which we shall have to look for him. Can you help me, Sutgrove?" He turned to me.

"It's only guesswork," I answered as I took a pencil

and a piece of paper, "based upon what I have learned from running the *Mist*."

"Still, you use petrol, don't you?" he asked.

"Yes," I said. "I find that the *Mist* uses a pint per horse-power per hour, and, as you know, she is of 250 h. p. with a storage capacity of five hundred gallons. Now from what I have seen of the *Conqueror* I should judge that both her power and storage capacity are just about double those of the *Mist*. Thus, taking her possible speed at forty knots, her consumption of petrol would work out at something like one and a half gallons per mile, or, in other words, she would have a striking radius of 750 miles."

"Bearing in mind, of course," interpolated Withington, who had followed my calculation carefully, "that at the end of the 750 miles run her tanks would be empty."

"So that in reality," said Forrest, "Mannering's boat has an effective striking range of 375 miles from his base, wherever that may be?"

"Exactly," I answered.

"Then," continued the detective, "how do you account for his movements from the first day of his appearance?"

Neither I nor my American guest said a word for awhile.

"Let me tabulate the appearances," continued Forrest. "On the Tuesday he leaves the *Dunster Castle*, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Finisterre, with a couple of heavy boats in tow. On the Wednesday

## 102      The Cruise of the Conqueror

night he puts in an appearance at Calais and manages to refill his tanks. On the Thursday night he leaves Dover, and on Saturday night he passes you steering southwest, and later is sighted off Ushant. Puzzle: Find his base of operations."

I rose from my easy chair and hauled down a map from the shelf. "Let us work it out," I suggested.

But Mr. Withington merely stretched out his legs and said, quietly, "What's to prevent our piratical friend having a floating base from which to operate? It's simple enough," explained the American. "All he has to do is to arrange for a steamer to meet him at an agreed open spot, and he could fill his tanks from her as easily as he could do so on shore."

"There's a good deal in what you say," replied Forrest, thoughtfully.

We sat for a long while that evening discussing the possibilities of the situation, and we could only come to the conclusion that he must have some lair on the Spanish or Portuguese coast. Forrest informed us that the authorities having already arrived at the same conclusion, the Admiralty had taken steps to have the suspected waters patrolled. But we could formulate no new plan of campaign.

Forrest left us the next morning, promising to let me know immediately he heard anything further, and once more I settled down to wait as patiently as I might for any event which should bring me the opportunity I needed. However, since the Pirate had been sighted off Ushant, nothing more had been seen or

heard of him. The public impression, at least so I gathered from the newspapers, was that he had foundered in the gale, and nearly every paper devoted a considerable space to pointing out the improbability of a frail craft of the kind being able to survive such a storm. But I knew from my own experience that a much less well-fitted boat had managed to live through the gale, and I attributed Mannering's disappearance to a comprehension of the stir which the story of his daring would have created, and pictured him to myself as merely waiting until the excitement had subsided before emerging from his retirement to awaken it once more. Through Forrest I learned that this also was the official view, and so far as Mannering's appearance in the vicinity of my home was concerned I felt that, for awhile at least, I should have nothing to fear. Accordingly in my disguise I spent a good part of each day in the *Mist*, accompanied sometimes by Sanders and at others by Withington.

Under ordinary circumstances I should have found this sort of existence pleasant enough, but whether it was the realization of the fact that I was waiting for something to occur for which I might have to wait six months, or twelve for the matter of that, before it did occur, or whether I grew tired of being somebody other than myself, I found the days began to pass very slowly, and when, after a fortnight had elapsed, Withington suggested a run round to Plymouth in his yacht, I welcomed the idea. I wanted my wife to bring our little Evie with Edith Withington to make

## 104    'The Cruise of the Conqueror

up the party, but she had got an idea into her head that there was more chance of meeting Mannering on sea than on land, and though she did not fear for herself she would not run into any danger.

Accordingly we left the ladies at home, and dropped into Plymouth just before sunset with the intention of dining comfortably at the Royal Hotel and visiting the theatre afterwards for a couple of hours.

I think from the very moment I started that I felt a certain amount of uneasiness at leaving Evie even for the short period I proposed, but whether that was so or not, I know very well that I quite failed to enjoy my dinner.

My restlessness was so obvious that Withington remarked upon it, and when I confessed the cause he declared that I had been dwelling upon my own thoughts too much and that it was quite time I had a change. His remarks did not do much to soothe me, however, and I was very glad when we got aboard again and slipped out of the harbour on our return to Salcombe.

I felt a little easier in mind when, after rounding the point which hides the town, I saw glimmering on the hill the lights of my house. Even then I was the first in the dinghy, and no sooner did we touch the steps of the little quay, than I jumped ashore and without waiting for anybody else hurried homewards. What possessed me to do so I cannot tell, but it was well I obeyed the impulse. What I had dreaded had come to pass.

## CHAPTER XI.

### WHEREIN MY GHOST WALKS

I SUPPOSE everybody must have experienced at some time or another something similar to the strange sensation which possessed me and, despite my efforts to reason it away, impelled me to act as I did. I do not pretend to even a bowing acquaintance with psychology, so I must leave the explanation for this strange state of mind in more erudite hands. The moment I touched the land it seemed to me that the idea of something impending, the fear to which I could not give a name, the sense of an imminent peril, seized hold of me with redoubled force. It was almost as if some one were calling me with a voice which it was impossible to resist. I tried to tell myself that this feeling was merely the result of an overwrought brain, the mere jangle of overstrained nerves. I found no relief thereby. On the contrary, my anxiety only deepened, I commenced to hasten my steps, and as soon as I had passed through the Salcombe street I began to run. My home was a good mile from the quay, so that by the time I had reached the lodge gate I had not a great deal of breath left, for the road had been all up-hill; I had covered the distance in seven



## 106      The Cruise of the Conqueror

minutes at the most. I just vaulted the gate and then, for what reason I do not know, moderated my pace to a walk.

The path still led upward, mounting the hill in a succession of easy curves. A pleasant breeze was blowing, and the grasshoppers chirped from the grass on either side. A little higher up I came beneath the trees which encircled the house. It was very dark beneath their shade, for the night was moonless. The leaves seemed to be whispering to me to hasten my steps.

I came out from the shadow of the trees on to the wide lawn which stretched directly around the house, bordered on one side by a continuation of the drive I had just traversed. Everything looked peaceful. There were lights in some of the bedroom windows, and my first glance showed me that Evie was probably still up and awaiting our return, for there was a bright light streaming from the three French windows of the drawing-room opening on to the veranda and giving direct access to the lawn.

"What a fool you are," I said to myself, as I stepped on to the soft turf in order to make a short cut to the lighted room. But the moment, when crossing the line of light, I came in view of the interior, I ceased to reproach myself, for my eyes rested upon a scene in some such rude drama as I had anticipated, and which, now it had occurred, had commenced in my absence.

There, his hand resting lightly on a little table upon which lay his yachting cap, stood Mannering, and opposite him was my wife, pale to the lips, but with

every line of her figure speaking more clearly than words could do of defiance.

"I am not too late. Thank God, I am not too late," I whispered to myself. I had become suddenly quite cool. There was the man who, besides attempting my life, had now come to rob me of what was far dearer than life. I stepped aside into the shadow, and my hand went to the pocket where I thought my revolver lay hidden. Heavens! It was not there. Too late I remembered that when dressing aboard the yacht before going ashore to dine, I had left the weapon in the clothes I had cast off. On returning, I had worn my evening clothes, merely covering them with a light overcoat, as the night had been pleasantly warm. Well, I should have to do without arms, that was all. I had no fear now. Faced with the reality, there was no time left for the imagination to become active. My steps fell noiselessly on the turf as I approached the windows, and stealthily as a cat I stepped on to the tiling of the veranda, keeping clear of the bright bands of light.

All of the windows were thrown widely open, and as I crept to the open casement nearest to the spot where Mannering was standing, his voice came clearly to my ear.

"You know I was never a man to be paltered with," he was saying. "At least, I have always given you credit for such intelligence as would lead you to come to that conclusion, and when I say that I want you, it is sufficient for you to know that you must needs come with me."

## 108      The Cruise of the Conqueror

His tone was masterful, and knowing how in the past he had been able to hold Evie in thrall — his power she had again and again declared was best described as the fascination of repulsion — I peered anxiously into the room to observe the effect of his words upon her. I knew then, that whatever had been his power over her in the past, it was no longer existent in the present.

"It is not sufficient," she replied, with an accent of sarcasm in her voice, and that, too, told me that Evie's fear of him had departed for ever. "It is not sufficient for me to know that you want me, to make me do your bidding. Don't you think you are putting rather a strain upon my credulity when you ask me to believe such a statement?"

"Believe it or not, as you please," replied Mannering. "Refuse or not, as you like."

"I most certainly decline to do anything so absurd," replied my wife in the tone of one refusing to attend a revivalist meeting or some other equally unpleasant function.

"Whether you decline or not will make no difference," said Mannering, angrily. Then his voice changed. "What is there to keep you in this cold, stupid England?" he urged. "There are far brighter lands. Why chain yourself to a dull round of petty conventions and faded sensations when a new life awaits you? You will not be content with this stagnant pond when the joy of travelling on a swift current of life calls to you."

"I am content here," she replied simply.

"Content?" he repeated scornfully. "Content for how long? No doubt you are comfortable, but this" — he made a gesture of disdain — "this is nothing to the luxury in which I can place you. Come," he said, "let me paint you the picture of the sort of home you may have in the future. I tell you that the wealth which lies within your grasp, which it is within my power to bestow, will make the kings of both hemispheres jealous — the dollar kings of the West equally with the crowned kings of the East."

In a perfectly even voice, which was cutting in its coldness, Evie replied, "I have not the faintest desire to be a toy for a pirate king of pantomime to hang his pieces of glass upon."

"Scarcely a pirate king of pantomime," he said grimly.

"I was merely judging you by your speech," she remarked.

"It may sound ridiculous to you," he replied, "but again I say that you should by this time know that I am no boaster. Think of it. There is nothing left to keep you in this land. There was a tie, but that has been severed. I will take your child with you."

The mother's wrath blazed out. "With my will, indeed, so long as I have breath, my darling shall not be so much as polluted by a glance of your eyes."

"Soh!" breathed Mannering, and as if recognizing the uselessness of appeal he changed his tone for one of menace. "There's only one really effective way with women — the way the Sabines peopled Rome, you re-

## 110      The Cruise of the Conqueror

member" — he laughed sardonically. "I must ask you to accompany me, madame."

I moved forward a couple of paces. Already I had stripped off my overcoat, and cast aside my wig and moustache. I had no desire to seem other 'han myself when I gripped my enemy again. Needless to say, his last remark had made me feel pretty murderous. As I stood without the window he was only five or six yards distant. He and Evie were facing each other, their faces being in profile, my wife being the further away.

"I must ask you to accompany me," repeated Mannering, "or ——"

He held a revolver in his hand, and he raised it as he spoke. "I cannot give you more than a minute to make up your mind."

I hardly knew what to do. Supposing when I dashed upon Mannering he should turn the pistol upon Evie. Quick as the thought flashed through my mind I realized that I must take the risk of such an eventuality. But before I translated my thought into action, Evie, glancing up, saw me, and with wonderful presence of mind straightway formulated a plan to extricate herself from the dilemma. Before I could move she was speaking again.

"You think you have me in your power, Mr. Mannering," she said, "but let me tell you that there is one who swore to protect me from you dead or alive. I have no fear of you." She looked him straight in the eyes, and there was a peculiar thrill in her voice, "Do

you know he is near us now? Watching — ever watching. Yes, you may think Jim is dead, and dead he is to the world, but — but —” her voice sank to an impressive whisper — “he is not dead to me, and he will not be dead to you. Hark!”

“Pooh!” remarked Mannering, but I could tell that he was uneasy. “You cannot scare me with that sort of nonsense.”

“Nonsense?” replied Evie in the same hushed note of conviction. “Nonsense? No, it is not nonsense. Since he died I have seen him. He came to me, in the night — I was listening to the rustling of the leaves, for it was a night like this — ‘Dear,’ he said, ‘when danger of any kind threatens I shall be near. You have only to call my name.’ Do you want to see?” She had held him so completely with her glance that I might have reached him without observation on his part, but truth to tell I was too much amazed at the turn the conversation had taken to do anything but stand stupidly still.

Suddenly Evie held up her hand. “Jim!” she cried in an awestricken whisper. “Jim!”

She turned from Mannering as if he had passed from existence and looked straight at me. Mannering’s eyes followed her glance, and, as they rested on me, the look of incredulity faded from his countenance and was succeeded by one of the most poignant horror I have ever seen depicted in the face of man before or since.

I made no movement.

## 112      The Cruise of the Conqueror

"Jim," said Evie again, "I knew you would come," and as she took a couple of paces towards me, I stepped forward to meet her. My advance was too much for Mannering. With livid face, and the sweat drops bursting from his forehead, he staggered back.

"Keep away! Keep away!" he cried hoarsely.

I did not speak lest the sound of my voice should break the spell of fear my appearance had cast upon him. As I advanced into the room I saw that there were other parties to the drama. Mannering had not come alone on the adventure, his companion being none other than the engineer of the *Conqueror*. The latter had been invisible to me until I had entered the room, for he lolled on a couch between the windows with Edith Withington beside him. The American girl had drawn herself as far away from the evil-looking ruffian as she could, but he held her tightly round the waist with one arm, while in his free hand he brandished an ugly-looking sheath-knife. But as I came into view his hold on the girl relaxed. He recognized me, even as Mannering had done, and it seemed as if the fear which had seized hold of the master had infected the man.

"Ach, Gott!" he grunted hoarsely, as the knife fell from his fingers and clattered on the floor, "It is the spirit of the Dover man."

Mannering's face had appeared ghastly enough, but it was composed in comparison with that of his comrade. The man was a red-haired, heavy-jowled German, and under ordinary circumstances might have been

deemed sufficiently ugly to excite repulsion in the eyes of the average man. But under the influence of supernatural terror he became absolutely hideous. His thick lips turned a livid hue, the blue colour being continued in a scar which extended from the corner of his mouth across one cheek. His face was pale and his bulging eyes seemed bursting from his head. But strangest of all was the effect upon the huge ears, which appeared to stand out at right angles. Under the influence of his terror the facial muscles twitched so strongly that the ears waved to and fro, the only moving point in a frozen mask of horror.

Slowly I advanced towards the two men, for Man-nering had backed towards his comrade as if for protection. But my approach was more than the German could bear. With a howl he jumped to his feet and bounded to the window. He tripped as he did so and fell with a crash, bringing down with him an occasional table. Turning my eyes for a moment from Man-nering, upon whom I had hitherto kept them steadily fixed, that individual also turned his back upon me and rushed for the open. I sprang forward to arrest his progress, but I was too late. Fear had lent his feet wings. He was across the room and had vanished into the night before I had made a couple of steps in his direction. The German, too, blundering to his feet, hurled himself through a window, and I, seeing Man-nering had disappeared, turning in pursuit of him, tripped over the table he had upset and measured my length upon the ground.



## 114      The Cruise of the Conqueror

But the German had not escaped entirely unscathed. Even as he had fled, Edith Withington, taking the only thing handy which would serve as a missile, the knife which the ruffian had dropped, hurled it at him with so good an aim that it struck him full on the cheek and supplied him with a duplicate scar to the one he had acquired on some previous occasion.

I picked myself up as quickly as I could, and rushed out on to the lawn. Even as I did so I heard Withington's voice.

"Mannering," I gasped. "Quick, or we shall lose him."

He was a man of action and wasted no time on any useless inquiries. "I'll just get a gun," he remarked, dashing into the house.

"Bring me one, too," I shouted, as he disappeared.

Meanwhile Evie had alarmed the household, and she had been joined by the scared servants who had been aroused already by the disturbance created by the German in his flight. The two men servants joined me as Withington returned with a couple of revolvers in his hand.

## CHAPTER XII.

### IN WHICH MANNERING ESCAPES THE TOILS

I HAD half-crossed the lawn when I came to a sudden halt. "Confound it!" I cried, "I have forgotten the signal."

Here let me explain the reason which so suddenly pulled me up at the very beginning of the chase. The only outcome of our council of war had been the devising of a plan to put the coast-guard on the alert if the Pirate should by any chance make his appearance in our midst. I had thought that any such proceeding would have been quite unnecessary, but Forrest, with his methodical habit of providing for all emergencies, had thought otherwise, and I had eventually accepted his suggestion. He had argued that even if Mannering did make his appearance he might escape my hands, and that any precaution which might cut him off from his boat would be worth while taking. Consequently he had interviewed the captain of the coast-guard and had arranged for steps to be taken with this object upon warning rockets being fired from my house. He had been particularly insistent upon this plan being adopted because of the nature of the coast, and I was now profoundly thankful that he had made the arrange-

## 116      The Cruise of the Conqueror

ment. For ten miles at least there were not half a dozen spots where Mannering could land, and the distance he was from any of them made it quite certain that he would not have time to reach even the nearest of these before the coast-guard, if my signal should be seen.

Therefore it was with the comfortable feeling of having power to cut off my enemy's retreat that I hastily retraced my steps to the spot where three rocket tubes were placed upon the lawn, and sent up the rockets at intervals of a few seconds. Even before the light had faded from the sky I turned and hastened towards the entrance gate with Withington and the two men servants close at my heels.

Once out of my grounds I turned away from the harbour. If Mannering had had the audacity to enter there I knew that he was safely bottled, for Sanders was aboard the yacht, and some one would be certain to call his attention to the rockets. Besides, as a means of precaution the yacht had been anchored each night in a position to command the entrance to the fairway and had been provided with a one-pound quick-firer which would be quite sufficient to put an end to the *Conqueror's* capacities for mischief if she came within range. I soon had ocular demonstration that my signal had been observed from the yacht, for even as we passed the lodge gate three answering rockets from the harbour repeated my warning.

I did not expect, however, that Mannering would have taken the risk of entering so dangerous a passage

when there were a number of other places, where in calm weather, such as at present prevailed, he might land with much less chance of being observed. The nearest of these was a little bay about a couple of miles as the crow flies distant from my house, which seemed to me to be much more likely to be selected by him for a landing-place than any other. This bay, lying under Bolt Head, was approachable from the open sea, the bottom was soft sand, and it was deeply shaded by the broken cliff, which was thickly wooded fifty feet from the water-line, and at the base broken up into numberless secure but narrow coves.

It was, therefore, in the direction of this bay that we hurried, leaving the road after awhile to take a short cut through a piece of woodland, and then to follow a little stream through some meadows in its path towards the sea. We made a breathless sort of progression, but our advance was rapid in spite of the darkness, which, though annoying in some respects, I reckoned would be, if anything, in our favour, since Mannering would certainly not be better acquainted with the country than myself. Fortunately, our path was all down-hill, so that when we tripped over obstacles there was very little delay. We blundered on for a quarter of an hour, when suddenly the sound of a pistol-shot directly ahead made us redouble our pace. We were then just about a quarter of a mile from the bay for which we were making, and our way was entirely through rough pasture.

I could only put one construction upon the sound

## 118      The Cruise of the Conqueror

of the shot which we had just heard. Mannering had reached the place and had found one or more of the coast-guard awaiting him. Hoping that I should not be too late, I darted forward at the top of my speed. I came to the last meadow, beyond which lay the coast road, and beyond that again the wall protecting the road from the sea, and as I dashed across the turf I gazed eagerly into the darkness, but I could see nothing. A few seconds later I stood on the road and strained my eyes upon the sea.

I was not mistaken in my deductions. The tide was low, and fifty yards distant I saw a long, slender boat, just a line of deeper darkness upon the face of the night. I heard Withington come panting on behind me as I dropped over the wall and plumped on to the soft sand. Once on the level I could see more clearly, and I was certain that it was the *Conqueror* I was gazing upon, though the boat was only dimly visible, outlined against the open sea beyond the mouth of the bay. But it looked as if I should not be too late, for in the next moment my eyes took in another feature of the scene. One of the two fugitives was already in the boat, but the other was still on land, engaged in a furious struggle with another man. But even as I watched, the struggle ended. One man broke loose, the other staggered and fell, and as he did so he uttered a cry, which, as it rose from his lips, was cut short, to end in a long-drawn bubbling groan. The man who had torn himself away dashed into the water, and, active as a cat, lifted himself aboard the boat, which

immediately shot away from the shore. I uttered a yell of disappointment as I dashed forward, and, raising my revolver, fired as fast as my finger could press the trigger.

It can be easily understood that my aim was not successful. Any one who has ever attempted to hit a rapidly moving mark after a two-miles run can readily conceive why I should have missed. In fact, even before I had emptied the magazine of my pistol, the Pirate had swept round the point which shut in the bay from the south, and had disappeared.

I could have howled aloud in my vexation, and for a moment I stood still, gazing despairingly in the direction of the vanished boat. But I was not allowed to remain so for long. A cry from Withington recalled me to action.

"Come here, Sutgrove," he said, in a sharp, anxious voice.

As I turned in his direction he struck a match. I saw him bending over the prostrate form of a man, and I stepped towards him. He was not more than a dozen paces distant, and I had taken two of them when I tripped over something soft and fell on my face. One of my hands outstretched to save myself from injury touched a face, and my fingers were covered with something warm and clammy. With a shudder of horror I picked myself up, first wiping my hand on the sand, and, shivering all over, joined Withington without a word.

"See here," he said gently, as I reached his side, "he

## 120      The Cruise of the Conqueror

has done for this poor fellow." Bending to the ground he struck a second match, and the light of the flickering flame revealed the pallid face of one of the coast-guard. The glazing eyes were enough to have assured us of his fate even had there been no other sign of death. But the clean little blue hole drilled in his forehead spoke only too eloquently as to the means by which fate had overtaken him.

"I don't understand," remarked Withington, as the light flickered out. "I thought I saw two chaps struggling together, and yet I heard no shot after I got on the beach. This man could never have moved after that hole was drilled in his forehead."

"You have not seen the whole of the handiwork of the Pirate," I answered. "Come this way."

Retracing my steps to the spot where I had fallen I struck a light.

I shiver now when I think of what met our view. I do not know to this day which of the two ruffians had been responsible for the ghastly work, but whichever of them had done it had known no compunction. A remorseless heart had guided the powerful hand which had drawn the knife across the throat of the poor fellow lying at our feet and ended his existence with one blow.

While we bent over him to see if perchance any sign of life lingered yet within him, there came a patter of feet on the sand and my two servants made their appearance. It had occurred to me that they had not been quite so rapid in their progress as they might

have been. But I did not blame them. One does not engage servants nowadays for their physical attributes, nor am I optimistic enough to suppose that they consider a rough and tumble with pirates to be a part of the daily duties they are engaged to perform.

"It is all up with this one, too," said Withington, as they came on the scene. "What is to be done?"

I had made up my mind — the events of the past few days rather tended towards inculcating the necessity for rapidity of decision — on one point at least, namely, that dead I appeared to be a far more efficient protection to Evie than if I were alive. So I stood for a minute thinking how I could manage under these new circumstances still to lie *perdu* in face of the outcry which must of necessity arise. I called the two servants closer and rapidly explained to them my determination to remain still in concealment. Then I turned to Withington. "You will have to take the lead in this affair," I said. "It was you who disturbed the pirates in an endeavour to break into my house; it was you who took up the pursuit with the servants, and it was you who arrived here in time to see them sail away and to discover these poor victims of their bloodthirsty methods. What need is there to mention my name in connection with it? Besides, we can get Forrest down, and he will be able to explain matters to the coroner in order to avoid any awkward questions being asked at the inquest."

"Well, I'll see the matter through," he answered,



## 122     The Cruise of the Conqueror

after brief deliberation, though I could see from his tone that he disliked the job.

I thanked him warmly and I turned to the two servants. One I sent to the coast-guard station, which was less than half a mile distant, with strict instructions to allude only to themselves and to Mr. Withington as having taken up the pursuit.

When they had departed on their several errands, I turned again to my friend. "I shall have to disappear before they come back," I said. "I hope you do not mind. There is not the slightest chance of Mannering returning."

"No," he said. Though I could not see his face in the darkness, I could tell from his tone that he was deeply moved. "I only wish there were," he continued. "I would give a great deal to be brought face to face with the perpetrators of this bloody business."

"So would I," I answered him. "Mannering is piling up a big score, and there is nothing would give me more satisfaction than to be the humble instrument by which it might be wiped off."

Without more words, but with just a grasp of the hand, I turned away and retraced my steps by the path along which we had descended to the bay. But my progress was very different to what it had been. Mannering had escaped, and it seemed to me, in my dejection, that I was not only responsible for that escape, but for the tragedy which had resulted therefrom. It is true that I had not expected him to make his appearance at my home in so melodramatic a manner.

When I had conceived the idea of disappearing, it had been with the view that Mannering, supposing his identity undiscovered, would have landed in England as an ordinary traveller, and thus sought an opportunity of revealing himself to my wife. It had only been a suggestion of Forrest's that he might make his approach in the manner he had done, which had led to the provision of any attempt to provide against such an emergency. I cursed myself for having left the house unguarded as I had done. Reflection, however, showed me that it was just as well that I had been absent. Had I been at home Mannering would assuredly have observed me, for I should, in all probability, have remained in the drawing-room with my wife and Edith Withington. As things had happened, both he and his companion had fled in the firm belief that Evie was under ghostly protection, and the expression on their faces showed me clearly enough that neither of them would make any attempt to molest her any further. Still, her protection had been dearly bought at the cost of the lives of the two men who lay motionless on the seashore, and the heaviness of my spirits at the thought made my progress slow.

I pulled myself together before I reached the house, and made the best of a show of cheerfulness in my power as I turned across to the windows, which still remained open. But my face must, despite all my endeavour, have revealed that things had not gone well, for, as I entered, Evie rose from a seat with a little cry.

## 124      The Cruise of the Conqueror

"What has happened, Jim?" she asked, anxiously. Then another cry followed, and Edith Withington, her lips paling as she realized that I was alone, asked, "Where is father?"

"He is all right, I am glad to say," I answered, promptly. "I have only come home because I still wish to remain in concealment."

"And Mannering?" asked Evie, eagerly.

"He has escaped us this time," I answered, savagely, "and, in doing so, he has done for two poor fellows who intercepted him at the little bay under Bolt Head."

Softening my story as much as I could, I gave them details of all that had happened. When I had finished, Withington had arrived on the scene. He had merely waited until the captain of the coast-guard had relieved him from his watch before following me home.

Then I turned to Evie. "Tell me," I said, "how it was Mannering made his appearance. I shall never forgive myself for being absent."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### I DECIDE TO RETAIN MY GHOSTLY CHARACTER

"It was like this," said Evie. "Edith and I, to pass away the evening, went after dinner to the billiard-room for a game. We played a hundred up, and you can guess about how long it lasted?"

"Anything between three hours and four, father would say," remarked Edith Withington, "though as a matter of fact the game did not last much more than an hour."

"I'm not sure whether it was one hour or two," laughed my wife, "but the hour was close upon twelve when we finished and came back to the drawing-room, undecided whether to go to bed or await your return. The night was so calm and peaceful that we thought it would be a pity to waste any of it, so we strolled on the lawn for half an hour and then returned for some music."

"That is how they managed to come upon us unnoticed," interpolated the fair American.

"Yes," said Evie. "You can easily see from the position in which the piano is placed that our backs were to the window. I had sung a couple of songs and Edith three. She was just in the middle of that

## 126      The Cruise of the Conqueror

favourite little suite of Turkish songs — you know them, Jim" — she turned to me.

"I know of two bright eyes," I quoted.

"That is the song," she answered. "Well, Edith was singing to my accompaniment, and as she finished — you remember the words, 'O Myrra, O Myrra, I soon will come to thee!' — a low laugh sounded right in my ear."

"You can imagine how we just jumped," remarked Edith, emphatically.

"Neither of us screamed, though," continued my wife. "Did we, Edith?"

"I guess we were both too scared," was the reply.

"I don't think you are far wrong," Evie agreed. "We certainly were horribly frightened when we saw who our visitors were. I recognized Mannering at once. He was looking straight at me with the same piercing glance which used to terrify me so greatly before I was married, but somehow, though I have far greater reason to fear him now than I ever have done in the past, yet I seemed to have lost that dread which I once had of him. I was frightened of him, of course, but it was not the same sort of feeling he used to inspire. I only feared him as I should any ordinary burglar."

"Well, I don't know what other sort of fear you mean," remarked Edith Withington, "but I had a fright which will be quite sufficient to last me a lifetime."

"Poor Edith!" said my wife. "She really was

## I Retain My Ghostly Character 127

treated worse than I was. That red-haired ruffian caught her by the waist, and, throwing her on a couch, threatened her with his knife."

"When we meet that crowd again you must leave that man to me," said Withington, grimly.

"With pleasure," I answered, with equal significance of tone. "Finish your story, dear," I added, turning again to my wife.

"I said nothing, waiting for Mannering to speak, and the moment he realized that he was recognized he said, 'What a charming song your friend was singing. The words might surely have been prophetic.'

"Still I said nothing, and he continued: 'I have come here at some inconvenience to myself in order to have a little conversation with you, Mrs. Sutgrove; but before we commence, may I give you and your friend warning that the slightest attempt either to make an escape or to create any noise will be instantly checked, with results most unpleasant to all concerned.'

"As he spoke he showed me a revolver which he kept in his hand. 'Well?' I asked as coolly as I could, though I was trembling all over.

"He was silent for a minute I should think. Then he remarked abruptly, 'You hardly expected to see me again, did you?'

"It flashed across my memory of a sudden that I was not presumed to know that he was still alive. 'I—I—Is it really you, Mr. Mannering?' I stammered.

"I suppose my manifest fright and my stammering

## 128      The Cruise of the Conqueror

speech must have been misinterpreted by him, for he at once earnestly assured me that it was himself and not his spirit that stood before me. I submitted to believe eventually, and then I ventured to ask the cause for his intrusion. How do you think he explained?" asked my wife, pausing for a moment.

"I'll be hanged if I know," I replied.

"He told me that he had heard that I was in trouble through your suicide, Jim, and assured me that in despite of the risk which he knew that he was running, he could not help hastening to see me. Do you know," she continued, "it was the flagrant hypocrisy of his words which finally destroyed all my fear for him?"

"You did not seem afraid when I caught sight of you," I remarked.

"No," said Edith Withington. "To me it seemed as if Evie never felt a tremor of fear the whole time."

"I did, though," replied my wife. "But somehow I felt a conviction that Jim would come to our aid and that our safety was in no way menaced. I began to get quite cool when he asked me to go away with him, and then I saw you standing at the window."

"That was a brilliant idea of you to make me personate my own ghost," I said.

"Eh! What was that?" said Withington.

"You tell Mr. Withington the rest, Jim," said Evie; and I did as I was bidden, not forgetting to relate how his daughter had hurled the red-haired ruffian's knife after him with such excellent aim. Afterwards

## I Retain My Ghostly Character 129

we each had to give a full account of our own exploits, and when the two men servants returned we had them in, in order to ascertain what had transpired on the beach. They had nothing of any importance to relate, but by the time their stories were finished there was the first flush of dawn in the sky and we all of us sought our beds, feeling pretty confident that we had no reason for fearing any further attempt from our enemy for some time at least.

All the same, none of us slept much, and though neither my wife nor Miss Withington put in an appearance at the breakfast-table, Mr. Withington turned up as usual at eight o'clock fuller than ever of the desire to discuss the events of the previous night.

"I tell you what it is," he declared, "I am certain I shall get no rest until that fellow Mannering is brought to book for his crimes."

"I feel still more keenly on the subject than you can do," I replied. "His continued existence is a perpetual menace to myself, and ——" I finished my sentence with a glance at the portraits of my wife and child.

"Yes," he answered. "You have more reason than I have for desiring his capture, but you must not forget to count me in when you take up the pursuit in earnest. Between us we ought to be able to do something."

"I have almost given up hoping," I replied, somewhat despondently.

"Cheer up," said my companion. "I should take



## 130      The Cruise of the Conqueror

just the opposite view if I were you, seeing how nearly your latest trap succeeded in snaring him. At any rate, I think Mrs. Sutgrove has no reason to fear anything more at his hands. If he was not afraid of you in the flesh it seems as if he was very considerably averse to meet you in the spirit."

"That's true," I confessed.

"It appears to me pretty certain that he will not come here again," continued Withington, "so if you really do desire to come to closer quarters with the gentleman the only plan for you to pursue is to go in search of him."

Withington spoke coolly, looking down at his fingertips. I gazed at him curiously. "What are you driving at?" I asked after a little pause.

The American glanced up at me, and there was a sharp, alert look in his face. "Look here," he said, eagerly. "Let me tell you something about myself. I am one of those people who are born tired ——"

"Nonsense," I interrupted.

"Wait till I have finished my sentence," he said, smiling. "I am one of those unfortunate persons who are born tired of doing the same thing twice."

"That is another story," I said.

"There are so few things for a millionaire to do and it is so easy to do them," he continued, plaintively.

"Except to make the millions," I hazarded.

"I don't know," he remarked thoughtfully. "The making of millions never presented any particular dif-

## I Retain My Ghostly Character 131

difficulties to me, and it is a habit of which one tires as easily as of any other."

"Well, there can be no difficulty about spending them," I said.

"Isn't there?" he replied with emphasis. "To spend a million in order to get any sort of satisfaction out of the spending is one of the most difficult jobs you can set a man." He was silent for a space before resuming. "You wonder where these confessions are leading. Do you know, Sutgrove, during the time when I ought to be asleep I am not quite sure whether I have not been envying the Motor Pirate? He is in the delightful acquiring stage of existence. He is feeling all the delights of becoming rich without any of the attendant discomforts. He has absolutely no necessity to practise hypocrisy. He is bound by no custom, has to bow to no conventions; he is a law unto himself and a terror to other men. What more can any man desire save a life which shall be brimful of new sensations?"

"You are not desiring that we should become pirates, too?" I asked laughing.

"No," he answered quite solemnly. "There are a number of objections to that course, but I see no reason why we should not set seriously to work to hunt the Pirate."

"H-m," I grunted. "I've been at the game before."

"And therefore there is none better fitted to take this task in hand. Come," he added persuasively;

## 132      The Cruise of the Conqueror

"won't you do this favour to a poor jaded millionaire?"

"Haven't you thought of the risks?" I argued.

"Thought of them?" he replied. "Don't you see that it is exactly those risks which appeal to me? It is the absence of risks which makes my life so monotonous. Nothing can happen to a millionaire. He is hedged in by his gold from nearly all the ordinary risks to which mankind is subjected."

I laughed heartily at his tirade.

"You may laugh," he said with a gleam of amusement in his eyes, "for I have perhaps exaggerated a little, but indeed there is a good deal of truth in what I say, and my reason for saying it is this. Since I cannot sate my soul with adventure by becoming a pirate on my own account, why should I not do the next best thing by undertaking a hunt for the only pirate left in this wide world?"

"I'll think it over," I said; and we left it at that.

I had plenty of time to consider the suggestion, for there was enough to do during the next two or three days to fully occupy everybody but myself. I had wired Forrest, in a cipher which had been agreed upon between us, the morning after Mannering had made his visit to Salcombe, and he had come at once to us. His arrival had resulted in an easy settlement of a number of minor details. For one thing he had seen the coroner and arranged with that worthy gentleman as to the evidence to be called at the inquest. The official found, on being acquainted with the inner facts

## I Retain My Ghostly Character 133

of the case, that he could manage very well to assent to my keeping my incognito, and really his speech to the jury when he excused himself for not calling Evie as a witness was a model of discretion.

"I have heard," he said, after explaining that she was too much distressed by recent experiences to make her appearance in the witness-box, "that Mrs. Sutgrove recognized, in the strange visitor who made his appearance at her house on that night, the remarkable criminal whose deeds shocked the whole of this country seven years ago. Whether that is so or not, gentlemen, matters very little in this inquiry. You have had the evidence of Mr. Withington, who was able to identify him as the man who won the Cross-Channel race a few weeks ago, and who followed him to the very spot where this crime was committed. It may be that Mrs. Sutgrove was so overwrought on this occasion that her identification, even had it been available, would not have been absolutely reliable, and somewhat tending to this view would also be the fact of which you may have heard some rumours, that she only succeeded in putting the ruffians to flight by calling on her husband — the unfortunate gentleman who so mysteriously disappeared at Dover immediately after the race to which I have referred — to come to her assistance. I should not like to say that there is no possibility of this strange appeal having met with some response. There are more things, gentlemen, on earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy, but that is not the matter we are called upon to investigate."

## 134      The Cruise of the Conqueror

But there is no need to follow him further. These, so far as I was concerned, were the salient points of his speech. Needless to say his remarks created a great sensation. The one unfortunate result was that Evie was beset with requests for interviews, and it was only by the most rigid watchfulness that we managed to prevent the invasion of our house by the army of pressmen told off to write up the affair. Eventually I found means to relieve the pressure by giving one or two written accounts of the proceedings to the less persistent of the reporters.

While thus engaged, nothing had been heard of the Motor Pirate. I had more than once discussed Withington's proposition with him and with Evie without coming to any conclusion as to what further steps to take, when I received a brief wire from Forrest, who had left Salcombe the day after the inquest.

The wire was despatched from Barcelona, and it said simply, "Am on the track, but want assistance. Yacht or boat preferred. Can you come? Wire *poste restante*."

"FORREST."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### IN WHICH I START ON A CRUISE

WITHIN half an hour of the receipt of Forrest's wire Withington and I had come to a momentous decision. What that decision was may be gathered from the message which we sent back to him. "Am bringing yacht round to Barcelona," it read. "If you are compelled to depart before our arrival, leave written instructions with British consul."

Yet, quickly as we had come to our decision, we were equally swift to carry it into effect. The cablegram had been received just about ten o'clock in the morning, and before eleven we were aboard the *Mascot*, which was the name Withington had given his yacht, and orders had been issued to weigh anchor directly there was sufficient head of steam to get her under way.

It may be thought that we acted somewhat blindly in thus responding so promptly to Forrest's request, but I knew that he would not have cabled such a message unless he had sufficient reason. Besides, I felt comfortable in my mind in regard to my dear ones since Mannering had been put to flight. Moreover, in order to set me thoroughly at ease in that respect Evie

## 136      The Cruise of the Conqueror

had promised me that she would leave Salcombe and take up her residence at our place in Norfolk. She had at first begged to be allowed to accompany us on our expedition, a plea which had been echoed still more emphatically by Edith Withington. But Withington had been at one with me in refusing to entertain the idea. What we proposed to ourselves was to make some effort to bring about a final reckoning with our enemy, and if we succeeded it would not, I knew, be a scene in which women would care to be spectators, much less actors.

Fortunately there was nothing to delay us. The *Mascot's* bunkers held sufficient coal to take us to Barcelona, and before noon we were well out in the Channel steering south-southwest and a half west with the smoke pouring from our stacks and leaving a long trail behind us. The weather was delightfully fine, ideal weather for a cruise; in fact, and everybody on board was in the highest of spirits as soon as the nature of the expedition upon which we were bound was realized. For Withington had not kept our intentions to himself. The moment we were clear of Salcombe, he had called the crew together, and in a very few words told them of the errand on which we were bound. "I did not trouble," he remarked in conclusion, "to ask any of you whether you would care to engage in this enterprise. You are all American citizens, so I took it for granted that there would be no difficulty on this score. If, however, there should be any who object, I'll land them at Barcelona and pay their passage back

to the States." Needless to say there was not a single member of the crew who expressed the slightest intention of accepting the offer, and after a momentary pause Withington continued: "As no one seems inclined to accept a free passage to New York I may as well take you all a little into my confidence." I was standing beside him, and he laid his hand on my shoulder. "You have most of you seen this gentleman before. He looks solid enough at the moment, but I can assure you that he is none other than the ghost whose appearance scared the Pirate from *Salcombe* the other day. At present he has disguised himself for fear of producing a similar effect upon such of you as had seen him at Calais or Dover. But he proposes to resume his natural form for this cruise, and I wish you all to understand that if by any chance I should happen to be incapacitated, you are to obey his commands as implicitly as if they were my own. And now, steward, if you will bring up half a dozen of *Moët* we will drink to the success of the *Mascot* in her quest."

The speech was greeted with a hearty cheer, and I am very certain that, welcome as it was, the champagne had nothing to do with the heartiness of the applause. A finer lot of men I have never seen. Including the master, a thoroughly salted old yachtsman named Merrick, the ship's company numbered twenty, and to these were added Withington, Sanders, and myself. At least half of the crew were men who had served in the United States Navy, and to look at them was sufficient



## 138      The Cruise of the Conqueror

assurance that the prospect of a fight was far more exhilarating than a bucket of champagne would be.

The moment Withington had concluded his little speech I slipped into the cabin, and, with considerable relief, divested myself of the disguise in which the crew had hitherto beheld me. I was truly tired of the make-believe, and when I had scrubbed the paint off my face and thrown my wig through one of the ports, and the slop-suit after it, I felt, I imagine, very much as if I were a ghost returning to the occupancy of the body it had quitted. It did not take me long to slip into some clothes more in keeping with my position as deputy commander of the *Mascot* than those I had been wearing, and to return to the deck, where my arrival was welcomed with a general upraising of glasses and many a hearty greeting.

The little break in the ship's discipline was not prolonged. At a word from Withington the steward gathered the glasses together and the men returned to their duties. Then my American friend turned to me.

"I have an agreeable little surprise for you, Sutgrove," he remarked, pointing aft, where the master was superintending some operation which, for the moment, I could not comprehend. I walked across the deck, and then it flashed upon me. "A gun!" I cried.

"Exactly," replied Withington with a complacent air. "It is no use going in search of pirates unarmed, is it? I have two of those chaps and with a one-inch quick-firer mounted at the fore and another aft, and a

couple of Maxims amidships, we ought to make short work of the *Conqueror* if she should happen to come within range."

"Yes," I said, "though there is much of dubiety in that 'if.'"

"Still, there is a chance, or Forrest would never have wired for us," he replied. "It is true that if it came to a chase he could leave us, but at the same time, he would never expect a yacht to be carrying guns, and he might find himself under fire before he realized his danger."

"I hope you are a decent shot," I hazarded.

"Never fired a gun in my life," he answered. "But I discovered, as soon as I made inquiry, that I had a couple of good gunners aboard, so that if we do get an opportunity of a brush with Mannering we ought to be able to give a decent account of ourselves."

With this he led the way below, and over our lunch we continued to discuss our arrangements. The subject was not soon exhausted, and afterwards we found a fruitful topic of discussion in surmising the nature of the clue which had tempted Forrest to communicate with us. But surmise did not carry us any further, and we set ourselves to enjoy the voyage, conscious that every hour brought us nearer the only person who could satisfy our curiosity.

Fortunately the weather remained of the most favourable character, and the *Mascot* was kept under full steam, until, on the morning of the fourth day, we

## 140      The Cruise of the Conqueror

sighted the port for which we were bound, and Withington ordered the pilot signal to be hoisted at the fore, just before we went below to breakfast. Our trip had been absolutely uneventful, save that, as we had passed Finisterre, we had seen for ourselves that the Spanish coast was being carefully patrolled by British torpedo destroyers whose only object could have been the Pirate's capture. I had hoped that they would be successful, but I do not fancy that my wishes were shared by any one else on board. The commander and the crew of the *Mascot* would, I believe, to a man, have resented Mannering's capture by any one but ourselves, and they kept a keen lookout for any signs of him, in spite of the improbability of the *Conqueror* making an appearance.

For my own part I expected Forrest's clue to turn out to be something of a mare's nest, for I did not see how it would have been possible for Mannering to have taken his boat round to the Mediterranean without being observed, or without making further provision for a supply of petrol. I had remarked upon these doubts to Withington and he had pooh-poohed them. "You can depend upon it that your friend the detective would never have brought us round here on a wild-goose chase. He is not that sort of man," he declared emphatically. Indeed, it was soon to be proved that Withington's estimate was correct.

We were still seated at the table when we heard the pilot-boat come alongside, and knowing that we had plenty of time before we could land, none of us

stirred. But the next minute the saloon door was opened, and greatly to everybody's surprise Forrest made his appearance.

"Better late than never, gentlemen," was his greeting.

Withington rose at the same moment as I did, and we both shook hands heartily with our friend.

"Just in time for breakfast," said Withington as he pressed the detective into a seat, "and while the cook is brewing you some fresh coffee, you will be able to tell us whether you dropped from the sky or came aboard with the pilot."

"As you must know by this time, if you read the papers, that we at the Yard are no fliers, I think you may bet on the pilot-boat as my means of approach," said Forrest, with a twinkle in his eye. "But before I tell you anything, I just want you to put your boat about and run straight for Palma."

"Why?" asked Withington.

"There will be plenty of time to explain, and time is of consequence," answered the detective.

Withington looked troubled. "I wish I could oblige you," he remarked, "but the fact is that the *Mascot* is not a big boat, nor was she coaled for a very lengthy cruise. She will be absolutely useless with empty bunkers, as you can well understand. I must coal at Barcelona before going any further."

Forrest looked horribly disappointed. "I had not thought of that," he said, adding gloomily, "I think I will have some breakfast then." The steward

## 142      The Cruise of the Conqueror

entered at this moment with the coffee and our visitor straightway turned his attention to the viands with a gusto which would seem to show that he had been on short commons for a considerable period.

He apologized for his appetite when he had finished. "I have been staying at a small hotel near the harbour, and thus for nearly a week I have been condemned to Spanish cookery, so you can perhaps understand that the sight of English fare overcame any remnant of delicacy which may have remained to me. Do you know that I feel as if I had been swimming in a sea of oil sustained by a life-belt composed of garlic?"

"Is it as bad as that?" I asked.

"Worse," he replied, "but before I tell you of these minor experiences of mine, may I first impress upon you the necessity of making all haste to get the coal you require on board?"

"Come on deck and smoke a cigar and we will see what we can do to hasten matters," said our host as he threw open the door.

We had just dropped anchor as we emerged from the saloon and at a little distance was the boat of the port authority making for us. "We had better go ashore for an hour or two," said Withington. "Our presence will not accelerate matters and we shall all be like niggers if we stay aboard."

With a smothered sigh Forrest assented, and as the few formalities required of yachtsmen were soon complied with we embarked in the gig and were soon set ashore.

I am not going to describe Barcelona, for the simple reason that during the few hours we remained there I gathered only a most general idea of the place. I know that under Forrest's guidance we went to the Fonda de las Quatro Naciones, and in a shady courtyard were served with some excellent coffee with liqueurs which were also quite excellent; and while we sipped the coffee Forrest thought fit to tell us of the circumstances which, coming to his knowledge, had led him to send the cable summoning us to the spot.

"You know how I said that I had small hopes of tracking Mannering by means of ascertaining where he obtained his petrol," he said, "but when I came to consider the matter I really could not think of any other source of information, so I at once set to work to make inquiries in London. I need not worry you with details, but at last I did glean something which aroused my suspicions. At a refinery in the East End of London I happened to hear of a large order for a specially refined motor-spirit having been given from abroad. I had no difficulty in obtaining full particulars, and the moment I heard them I guessed that I was on the right track. The order was a curious one. The spirit was to be delivered on board a specified ship then lying in the East India Dock, and it had been paid for by a draft on Messrs. Rothschilds drawn by the Bank of Spain. Here, of course, was the possibility of a connection with the *Conqueror* and I soon followed it up. I learned that the draft had

## 144      The Cruise of the Conqueror

been forwarded from the Barcelona branch of the Spanish bank. Then I proceeded to make inquiries about the ship. My suspicions became much stronger when I found that I could learn practically nothing about her. She was not classed at Lloyd's, so that I guessed she must have been purchased abroad and her name changed."

"What was she called?" I asked.

"The *Mary*," said Forrest. "I suppose Mannering would describe himself as her little lamb. Well, I inquired at the docks, and all I learned there was that she had a very tough crew of a mixed nationality, that she sailed under the American flag, and that she had cleared for Barcelona just forty-eight hours before I arrived on the scene."

"There usually is a mixed set aboard these oil ships," said Withington. "If he can get another berth the average seaman will not ship on them."

"Just so," replied Forrest. "But these facts, though suspicious enough in themselves, were, after all, nothing more than suspicions. There was only one means of finding out whether there was anything in them, and I came on here."

"Well?" asked Withington and I in a breath.

"Can you give me a light?" asked Forrest, as he cut the end of a fresh cigar with his pocket-knife, and we both greeted his quiet rebuke of our impatience with a peal of laughter, greatly to the surprise of the dignified waiter who was hovering behind us.

## CHAPTER XV.

### TELLING OF THE DISCOVERY INSPECTOR FORREST HAD MADE

WITH an amount of deliberation which was very trying to our patience Forrest lit his cigar and puffed away in silence for at least a minute before he resumed the story of his movements.

"I fancied I had come to Barcelona on a fool's errand," he said, "when the third day dawned and the *Mary* had not put in an appearance. Have you ever been to the cathedral here?"

We all answered in the negative.

"I must take you to it," he continued, "and you will understand how it is that I am still here. I don't think I have ever struck a more restful place in the whole world. The silence and the shadow — well, they preached such a sermon to me upon the futility of haste that I believe I should be in Barcelona to-day even if the *Mary* had not put in an appearance."

"If that is the effect of the cathedral I reckon we had better not visit it," said Withington.

"There is no longer any need for patience," replied the detective, "for through my practice of this very desirable virtue I fancy that I can put you on the track



## 146      The Cruise of the Conqueror

of our quarry. It was like this. On the third morning I met a man whom I recognized from the description supplied to me as Mannering's companion in the Cross-Channel race."

"Sanders's lop-eared blacksmith?" I asked eagerly.

"None other, I should imagine," replied Forrest.

"This looks like business," commented Withington.

"Of course I cannot swear to his identity," continued the detective, "but I have very good reasons for supposing I am not mistaken, as you shall hear. His appearance tallies exactly with that of the midnight visitor to your place at Salcombe, and a lot of plaster strapping on his cheek is additional evidence of his being the same man. I know him to be a German because I heard him swear in that language, and I have oftentimes observed that when it comes to dealing out damnation to one's fellow creatures, men instinctively revert to their mother tongues."

"The proof is sufficient," I said, laughing. "Where did you meet him?"

"At the usual place for meeting long expected guests—the railway station. There was nothing dramatic about it. To pass away the time I went to witness the arrival of the Madrid express and see if I could recognize any acquaintances amongst the passengers."

"Are you quite sure that you were not inquiring about the time of departure of another train?" I asked slyly.

"Quite," he answered. "The motive which took me to the station was much more like that which

## Discovery Inspector Forrest Made 147

prompts the bus driver to spend a holiday riding on a front seat of a fellow driver's 'bus. It shows how one's professional instincts tend to dominate one's smallest actions. I am thankful they did dominate me in this case, for I could not have been so delighted when I saw the German light from the train. For a moment I half expected to see him follow him out of the coach, but in that he was disappointed. No one was there to meet him, and he obviously expected nobody. He had a hand-bag and directly he was brokenly out of the station in the direction of the harbour. It was obvious to my mind that he was on his way to Barcelona to meet the *Mary*."

"And how did he ask Withington, eagerly.

"To cut the story short," answered Forrest, "he asked me to confirm my suspicion. When I had reached the station the *Mary* had entered the bay, and in an hour of the German's arrival she was drawing her anchor in the harbour. I had followed him at his heels, but I was puzzled how to act when he hailed a boat and expressed his desire to be taken aboard. In fact, until he did so, I had been undecided as to whether the new arrival was the *Mary* or not. I saw the ship has nothing distinctive about it. She is just an ordinary tramp with a couple of funnels and a dingy red line to relieve the dingy black of her hull. When my suspect went aboard I was in a bit of a quandary as to what course I had better pursue. I knew very well that Mannering was not likely to be aboard, and after all he is the

## 148      The Cruise of the Conqueror

man we want. It seemed to me that if any action were taken against the *Mary* he would only be put on his guard. Besides, I had only suspicions to work upon, and the man I had been following might have turned out to be a purely innocent German subject — there are plenty of ugly-looking, red-haired *Deutschers* about with big ears and square jaws — and his majesty with the mailed fist would be delighted at a chance of resenting an insult offered to any one of them."

"Particularly if the nation on whose territory the insult is offered is not in a condition to hit back," remarked Withington.

"Exactly," agreed Forrest. "So there was nothing for it but to once more put into practice the lesson I had learned at the cathedral. I sought out one of the harbour officials whose acquaintance I had scraped by reason of a slight knowledge of English that he possessed, and persuaded him to make some inquiries about the new arrival at the port. What he gathered gave me a certain amount of satisfaction. The *Mary*, according to the account given by her master, had put into Barcelona for repairs to her boilers, which had developed some defects, and the completion of these repairs was estimated to require three days, if not four. The moment I heard this fact I went to the telegraph office and wired for you."

"It was real kind of you, sir," said Withington so heartily that Forrest smiled.

"I am glad you feel like that," he said, "though I do wish you could have managed to have brought your

## Discovery Inspector Forrest Made 149

yacht round some twenty-four hours earlier. Now that the *Mary* has had such a start there is sure to be some difficulty about finding her again."

"It is annoying," I said, "though I suppose you managed to hear something about her destination while she was here?"

"It was announced that she was bound for Algiers," said Forrest, "but I have my reasons for doubting the information. Unfortunately, there was almost man-o'-war discipline kept on board the *Mary*, and even when the men did come ashore they were so tight-lipped a set that they might almost have been trained at the Yard. They cost me a small fortune in drinks," he continued mournfully, "and I could not get a scrap of useful information from any one of them."

"That's unfortunate," remarked Withington. "It will be no joke to hunt for a tramp steamer in the Mediterranean."

"I did not say I had been entirely unsuccessful," said Forrest. "I dropped in at a shop one day when the red-haired German was purchasing a chart of the Balearic group."

Withington rose from his seat and extended his hand to the detective. "Sir," he said solemnly, "let me take this earliest opportunity of expressing to you my high appreciation of your painstaking methods."

Forrest looked both puzzled and surprised as he shook hands with the millionaire. "I don't quite see that I have done you a personal favour," he remarked. "Indeed, to me it seems that I am in your debt."

150      The Cruise of the Conqueror

"You don't realize," I explained, "what it feels like to be absolutely *blasé*. When you are a millionaire who has exhausted every possible sensation and you dangle before his eyes the prospect of meeting a real pirate at the commencement of the twenty-first century, you will realize the depth of gratitude Withington feels towards you."

"H-m!" remarked Forrest. "If I were only halfway to millionairdom I should not trouble myself about a dozen pirates unless they set out to look for my own personal property."

"Wouldn't you?" I replied. "I venture to think, Forrest, that you would be nearly as keen as Withington. I should judge that with you the pursuit of the criminal is as much of a passion as shooting big game is with the genuine sportsman."

"Perhaps," replied the detective. "At all events, I am keen enough on this occasion, and the sooner we are afloat the better I shall be pleased."

Withington looked at his watch. "We have two hours yet, I am afraid," he said. "Suppose we see if the cathedral will enable us to secure the same equanimity which enabled you to be patient for three whole days."

We followed Forrest through a broad avenue until we reached the old town, and passing through narrow streets turned into a particularly squalid lane.

"There is another way," he remarked, "but in order to get the real effect this is by far the best entrance."

## Discovery Inspector Forrest Made 151

He was right. Suddenly we found ourselves in an open court flooded with sunlight glancing amongst the palms and orange-trees and reflected from the fountains, while under the shade of the arcades of the cloisters picturesque beggars drowsed away their time. We did not linger here, however, but passed into the cathedral, and I realized at once the effect which Forrest had declared had been produced upon him. The change from the brilliant light was exquisitely poignant. The soft cool gloom enwrapped one with a delicious sense of restfulness. Then as the eyes became accustomed to the change there gradually emerged a knowledge that the darkness was only relative, that it was made up of a wealth of colour in which the dominant notes came from the richly tinted glass of the windows casting rich splashes of colour on pavement and altar. There were no guides, no sacristan, nobody, in fact, to worry, and we drank in the restfulness of the place to our hearts' content.

I think that we forgot even Mannering, and it was not until we emerged into the open air that I glanced at my watch and discovered that the ten minutes we had promised ourselves had been trebled at the very least. This being the case, we made no other attempt to see any more sights, but returned directly to the harbour and to the surprise of the whole party no sooner did the *Mascot* come into view than we observed that the last lighter had just sheered off from her side, and the black cloud pouring from her smoke-stacks assured us that Withington's instructions for steam to

## 152      The Cruise of the Conqueror

be got up at the earliest possible moment were being obeyed to the letter.

"Your confounded old cathedral," said Withington to Forrest, "has wasted us at least five minutes."

If such was the case, there was no time lost afterwards, for the moment we got aboard the master approached Withington.

"The anchor's apeak, sir; shall I weigh?" he asked, and before Withington had time to reply the whistle shrilled, and was followed by the rattle of the windlass as the cable came home.

"What course, sir?" was the next question.

Withington looked at me, then he looked at Forrest.

"I'm hanged if I know," he remarked.

"There's a cable to Palma, I know," remarked the detective, "and I should hardly think that our friends are likely to be too near the end of a telegraph wire. Why not try Minorca first? We might pick up some intelligence at Port Mahon. I am not quite certain whether there is telegraphic communication there with the main land, and it is a smaller place."

"Port Mahon be it, then," said the American, and, turning to the master of the *Mascot*, he gave him a brief sketch of the information with which Forrest had furnished us. The worthy mariner rubbed his hands with delight at the story. "The only thing which troubled me in this little adventure," he averred, "was the unfortunate fact that there were only two pirates. Now, I guess that instead of only two there ought to be enough of 'em to put up a real fight for the *Mascot's*

## Discovery Inspector Forrest Made 153

men. Not enough to tire 'em, but sufficient to make them feel that they will have an interest in the result."

"I don't think you have guessed very far wrong," replied Forrest, "for, from my own observation, I should think that the *Mary* could not have less than thirty men on board. I watched her very carefully, and though while she was here there were never more than two or three to be seen on her deck at one time, yet, by counting the faces of the men who came ashore, I think my estimate is not far short of the mark."

The information soon spread through the ship, and when, after lunch, we returned on deck, the alertness of the crew showed how delighted they felt at a possible encounter. The *Mascot* was moving as fast as her engineers could force her along, and soon the grim fortress of Monjuich was veiled in a purple haze as we steamed merrily onwards upon a sparkling sea, typical of the Mediterranean in its gayest mood. So the afternoon wore away. We had sighted a couple of fishing-boats before we were clear of the bay, and an hour later a single funnelled steamship passed us on a course down the coast. The sun got lower on the horizon, and already the sky was flushing deeply when Withington proposed that we should spend the hour before dinner in looking over the charts to see where Mannering might be expected to have selected a place of security for his boat.

We had just got the maps spread out on the table of the saloon when the mate popped his head in at the door.



## 154      The Cruise of the Conqueror

"There's a vessel ahead which we cannot quite make out. She's flying the signal of distress," he remarked. As one man we made our way to the deck.

"Where is she?" asked Withington as he stepped on to the bridge.

"Two points on the starboard bow," replied the mate.

Forrest, Sanders, and myself hastened forward and gazed eagerly in the direction indicated. Already we had drawn near enough to the stranger to be able to make out the flag and ball hoisted at her fore without the aid of a glass. We were rising her rapidly, and in a few more minutes we were able to distinguish her hull, outlined blackly against the crimson flush on the horizon, and to see that a faint drift of smoke was curling from her stacks.

Presently Withington descended from the bridge and joined us forward.

"What do you make of her?" I asked.

"I cannot make out what is wrong," he replied. "There is absolutely no sign of any damage, yet neither I nor either of my two officers can perceive any one on her deck."

"That is certainly curious," I remarked. "Somebody must have hoisted that signal."

"We shall soon know the reason, anyhow," said Forrest with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Perhaps," said Sanders.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### IN WHICH WE ARE CONFRONTED WITH A MYSTERY OF THE SEA

SWIFTLY as we drew near the stranger, the oncoming dusk was still more speedy in its approach and prevented us observing anything clearly. Our answering signals had produced no response, and as we closed we could see that her head pointed now this way and now that under the opposing influences of wind and tide.

"Something very queer must have happened to that craft," said Withington. "Signals of distress flying, steam in her boilers, and no one at the helm; I don't understand it."

Nor did any of the rest of us, and we waited eagerly for the moment when we should come within hail. By the time we were near enough to do so it was blind man's holiday. Our lights had been trimmed, but no attempt had been made by the stranger to show any, and with the exception of the stokers every man was on deck as we ran alongside.

"What ship is that, and what do you need?" boomed out the voice of the master through his megaphone as with reduced speed we crept up to her quarter to windward.

## 156 The Cruise of the Conqueror

Every ear was strained to catch the answer, but none was forthcoming.

"Strange! Strange!" repeated Withington as we slowly slid past.

"We shall board her and see what is the matter, I suppose?" I asked.

"Certainly," replied the American, and turning to the master I noticed that there was a note of excitement in his voice as he said, "Call away the long-boat's crew, Mr. Merrick, and serve out arms to the men."

"Arms?" I asked in surprise. "You surely don't apprehend any danger?"

"Our friend is in these seas, and I have no intention of falling into a trap," replied the millionaire quietly as he stepped into the cabin, to reappear a moment later with a serviceable revolver strapped to his wrist and a keen-edged machete tucked under his arm.

Hastening to follow his example, we found on our return to the deck that the boat was already manned, and we tumbled speedily into our places.

"Keep her under your guns, Merrick," said Withington, and the next moment the oars took the water together and we darted off towards the mysterious stranger.

No one spoke a word as we sped towards the silent ship. There was something eerie about the spectacle of this well-found vessel drifting aimlessly on the sea, and every man of us, I fancy, must have anticipated that we were on the point of being brought face to

face with some catastrophe. As we approached, the sense of impending tragedy deepened, for no face appeared to gaze at us over the side and no voice hailed us to ask our business. Glancing upwards we could see that the boats hung on the davits and yet at the same time we perceived that the ladder was down. The only explanation that occurred to me was that the crew had been taken off by some other ship, and yet even if such had been the case the reason for the desertion seemed to me to be inexplicable.

When within a chain's length Withington hailed her again, but his voice was thrown back at him from the empty deck without any response save the sobbing of the wind and the lapping of the waves against the hull of the derelict.

"Give way, my lads," said Withington, and with a couple of strokes we swept alongside, and as the men shipped their oars and seized their weapons our skipper stepped lightly up the ladder.

I managed to be next out of the boat, and the others swarmed after us on to the deck. But our arrival there made no difference. The silence was still unbroken.

"I don't like it, Sutgrove," said my friend as we paused until the boat's crew had joined us.

So far as we could see in the gloom there was not a soul on deck, and bidding his men follow, Withington stepped towards the companion with the intention of going below. He had not taken more than a couple of paces when, as the ship gave a little roll, to my surprise he slipped and fell heavily.

158      The Cruise of the Conqueror

"Here, hold up, old fellow, you ought to have found your sea legs by this time," I remarked with a laugh, at the same time giving him a hand to help him to his feet.

"I stepped on something slippery," he replied. "By heavens! I believe — has any one a match?" he asked with visible agitation.

The words were not out of his mouth before Forrest struck a light, holding it strongly sheltered in the hollow of his hand.

"Here at my feet," said the American.

Forrest bent to the deck and the tiny flame was reflected from something which shone redly. A gust of wind extinguished the light and Forrest straightened himself.

"It is blood," he said simply, "fresh blood."

I shuddered at his tone, and every man of us stood stock-still, for we knew not what we might stumble upon in the dark on the deck of the deserted vessel.

"Some of you must know where to find a light," said the detective impatiently.

Immediately Sanders slipped away to return a moment later with the binnacle lamp, which he had lifted from its socket. After lighting it, Withington took it from his hand and the whole party followed him handling their cutlasses. But we found nothing living. Everywhere were signs of some terrible butchery. The deck was smothered with spots and blotches of blood which in one or two places had even run into the waterways and lay there in little pools. But there

were no signs of any victims until we made our way forward. And there we came upon a man whom we thought to be the sole survivor. A man, I have written, but it was not so, only the clay was left. A young French sailor of twenty or thereabouts lay on the deck with his face upturned to the sky. The signal halyard was tightly grasped in his hand, and it would seem that his last act had been to hoist the signal which had attracted our attention.

At first we thought that he might be still alive, and placing the light beside him Withington knelt down and placed his hand upon his heart. "Dead," he muttered softly and rose again to his feet. "It is curious," he continued, "that his clothes are soaking wet. I could almost imagine that he must have been overboard."

Forrest took the light and rapidly examined the body. He soon discovered the cause of death. A long clean cut had nearly severed his left arm from the shoulder. An effort had been made to bind the wound, but the bandage had come loose.

"What do you make of it all, Forrest?" I asked as the detective rose to his feet.

He did not answer directly, but when he spoke it was with certainty. "This man was cut down from behind," he said, "and almost immediately was thrown into the sea. The sudden immersion and the chill of the water stanchd the flow of blood to some degree, and I fancy the poor fellow must have managed to bind up the wound roughly while still in the water. After-

## 160      The Cruise of the Conqueror

wards he managed to find his way on board again. But the effort was probably too much for him, the bandage he had applied must have worked loose. He just had strength to hoist the signal and then he fell."

"I should not wonder if you have indeed hit on the truth," remarked Withington, "but suppose instead of theorizing on the subject we see if there is any one below who can give us a solution of the mystery."

He led the way to the companion and stepped below without hesitation. He paused at the foot of the steps until Forrest and I had joined him at the door of the saloon before turning the handle and entering. Directly I was below a very familiar odour greeted me.

"Hullo! Petrol," I said.

What followed was so instantaneous that I hardly know how to describe it. Withington turned the handle of the door to enter, at the same time holding the lamp low down before him to see if there was a step to be negotiated. Then a blue flame seemed to shoot from the lamp, to be followed immediately by a blinding sheet of light and an explosion which hurled us all of a heap from the door. Almost suffocated with petrol fumes I struggled to my feet and made for the companion I had just descended. Withington and Forrest were before me. I saw them dash past the saloon door—saw them distinctly—for the dark cabin was now a raging furnace with a volume of flame roaring from the open door as if it were a vent of hell

itself. One glance was enough. Shutting my mouth and eyes I made a dash at the hatchway and never opened either until I felt a grip on my collar and a pair of sturdy arms swung me up on deck while many friendly hands beat out the flames which flickered about my clothing.

"It's lucky for you that petrol burns outwards instead of in," remarked Sanders.

"Are the others all right?" I gasped.

"Barring the fact that I am nearly scorched to a cinder, I think I can describe myself as all right," said Withington with a drawl, "and so far as I can discover by his language Forrest seems to have just emerged unhurt from his native place of residence."

I passed my hands across my eyes and my eyelashes rubbed off grittily.

"It was a near thing," I said with a laugh which had a touch of hysteria about it.

"Near do you call it?" said Forrest. "I feel as if I had made an ineffectual attempt to explore the lower regions."

"Rejected of hell," suggested Withington. The experience seemed indeed to have toned the American up to a degree unusual with him, and he was quite gay.

"The whole place must have been soaking with petrol, and the moment the light came near the vapour ignition was inevitable. I suppose we want no better proof that Mannering and his confederates have passed this way?" I said, turning to Withington.



## 162 The Cruise of the Conqueror

"Well, I will stay here and discuss the point if you prefer to do so," replied Withington, "though for my own part I think the deck of the *Mascot* will probably prove to be a more convenient place."

Indeed it was time to be moving. The flames were rising in a huge pillar from the hatch through which we had escaped, and at the same time there was another muffled explosion from below deck, and smoke began to arise from the forecastle hatch.

"The fire has found its way forrard," said Withington, "it is no use waiting to be cut off."

The crew went quietly over the side, but the rest of us paused a minute before joining them in the boat. There was no lack of light now. The flames, bursting out of the two hatches, burned like huge torches, and by their light we could gather some idea of the nature of the conflict which had been waged on the deck of the doomed vessel. There was blood everywhere, blood which had been spilt so recently that it had not yet had time to dry. Where I stood at the head of the ladder there was the impress of a big hand clearly marked on the rail.

Forrest's eye rested on it at the same moment as mine, just as he was stepping on to the first rung of the ladder, and he paused and looked at it earnestly.

"Want to add some more finger-prints to your collection?" said Withington.

"That is a souvenir of this night's adventure which I should appreciate," answered the detective.

"Right," said Withington, "you shall have it," and

calling to one of the men in the boat to hand him up a cutlass he set to work to hack at the timber.

"I think you had better let me have a shot at it," said the detective, and Withington handed over the weapon to him and watched while he cut a line with the point of it about the mark and then carved out the marked section.

Carrying his treasure carefully in his hand, Forrest embarked, and Withington and I following him, we shoved off at once upon our return to the *Mascot*.

By the time we reached the deck of the yacht the doomed vessel presented a magnificent spectacle, as, blazing furiously from stem to stern, she drifted with the tide. But she did not continue to drift for long. Instead a strange thing happened. As the fire ate its way into the heart of the ship she began to move to the impulse of her screw.

"Good heavens," ejaculated Withington, "the fire is heating her boilers."

"That would not set her engines working," remarked Sanders. "If ye ask me for an explanation I should say that the devil himself must be aboard yon boat."

"Unless you presume that the devil or devils who made that fire-trap adjusted the engines so that they should start of themselves when there was a sufficient head of steam in the boilers," suggested our skipper.

Sanders was still skeptical, but he could think of no other explanation, and soon the stranger was moving at a speed which necessitated our coaling furiously in order to keep up with her. But not for long did we

## 164      The Cruise of the Conqueror

follow her course. Soon her iron plates above the water-line began to glow with the intense heat, and we could even hear the hiss of the waves as they broke on her sides and were dissipated in clouds of steam. While we thus watched her progress the end was at hand. There was a heavy explosion, a great flash of light from the uprushing flames, a fountain of burning fragments tossed in the face of the sky, and then darkness and silence.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### WE MEET THE MARY

WHEN the last of the burning embers had been quenched in the waters, Forrest was the first of our party to bestir himself. "I think I will go below and wash some of the black off my face," he said with a yawn.

"By the time we have all followed your example," remarked Withington, "I fancy we shall be ready for dinner. Anyhow, we have certainly earned it. Put the *Mascot* on her course again, Mr. Merrick, and see that a couple of the smartest hands are on the lookout. Those who were responsible for that bit of work would not hesitate about serving us the same if they were to get the chance."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the master, adding softly as if to himself, "There's nothing I should like better than that they should make the attempt."

His tone conveyed such a cheery self-confidence that my nerves, which had been a little shaken by the events of the preceding couple of hours, seemed to recover their balance almost instantaneously, and I went below quite cheerfully.

An hour later we gathered round the table in the

## 166      The Cruise of the Conqueror

cosy little saloon of the *Mascot* with appetites which had suffered not a whit through the postponement of the evening meal. None of us were accustomed to take long over our toilets, but on this occasion the process was a lengthy one. It was rather a painful one, too. In the excitement I had not noticed the effects of the fiery ordeal through which I had passed, but when I tried to remove from my face the traces of the adventure, I found that my skin had become most uncommonly tender, though it was only actually blistered in one or two places. However, with much gentle sponging I managed to make myself to some extent presentable, though, as I had lost my eyebrows and eyelashes and had liberally anointed my face with vaseline, I presented a much sunnier countenance than usual when I made my appearance. Neither Forrest nor Withington were in any better plight. The latter, indeed, had a greater loss to lament than either of us. The long fair moustache which he had been wont to caress eternally had vanished, leaving him with only a short, bristly covering to his upper lip, which he had been compelled to brush up in the orthodox tooth-brush fashion.

There was only one subject in our minds, but we tabooed discussion upon it until we had finished dinner, and it was not until the coffee was served that we broached the topic of the derelict.

Then Withington introduced it abruptly. "That job was not the work of one man or two," he declared.

"No," agreed Forrest. "It was clear that there had been a fight and a stiff one."

"That means that Mannering has enlisted a band of confederates," I remarked.

"So much the worse for him," said Forrest. "It is the criminal who works alone who escapes. There's no safety in numbers so far as they are concerned. In fact I am so sure that Mannering would realize that such is the case that I am almost doubtful as to whether he can have been engaged in any way in this outrage."

"But who else would dare in these days to commit such a crime?" I asked.

"Now, do you think that Mannering would have left a job in so unfinished a condition?" he replied.

"Incomplete?" I queried in some surprise.

"Yes, incomplete," he repeated. "That ship was deserted in a sudden panic, for the ruffians who took the petrol on board left in such a hurry that they had no time even to fire the ship they had prepared for destruction."

"That certainly does not seem to be characteristic of Mannering's work," I agreed.

"Again," continued Forrest, "though Mannering has shown himself to be ruthless as to the suffering he inflicts in pursuit of any end he has in view, he has never yet shown any predilection for indulgence in mere insensate slaughter."

"True," I answered. "What, then, is your theory?"

"I am most likely wrong," said the detective, "but

## 168      The Cruise of the Conqueror

I should think the business was brought about somewhat in this way. Mannering has confederates, it is clear, and it seems pretty certain that those confederates shipped aboard the *Mary* in order to take a supply of petrol to some prearranged spot. Now, knowing that the *Conqueror* and her owner were in the vicinity, what is more likely than that the crew of the *Mary* thought they would do a little piracy on their own account, since they would be pretty certain that the loss of the ship would be attributed to their chief? It is obvious that it was only by accident that we were enabled to discover as much as we did, for the petrol could not have been intended to be left to a mere chance ignition."

While Forrest had been propounding his theory I had been racking my mind to try and remember where I had heard the name of the derelict previously. At the time I noticed the name *Eulalie* painted on one of the boats it had seemed familiar, and now it suddenly dawned upon me that I had seen a reference to it in some newspaper or other only a day or two before we had left Salcombe for Barcelona.

"There is one thing against your theory," I said quietly.

"Let's hear it," said Withington.

"I suppose you know all about the *Eulalie*?" I asked.

"No," replied our host, "I noticed the name, but it conveyed nothing to me."

"Nor to me," said Forrest.

"The *Eulalie* is the name of a steam-yacht of five hundred tons, owned by the Prince of Monaco, and used by that enthusiastic scientific notability when engaged in his favourite occupation of grubbing up mud from the bottom of the ocean."

"By Jove!" said Forrest. "As you say, that simple fact does to some extent dispose of my theory."

"I don't see why," declared Withington.

"Alive the Prince of Monaco would be a realizable asset," I explained. "Dead he would be valueless. But if, as I think was the case, the Prince had been on board that yacht and Mannering had no accommodation for keeping more than one or two prisoners, there would be a very sufficient reason why both the ship and her crew should cease to exist."

"He must be a veritable devil," said Withington.

"Another reason has also occurred to me," I continued. "He is quite capable of having ordered the massacre of the *Eulalie's* crew merely because they were in the way, but his action may also have been dictated by motives of policy."

"I don't quite follow you," said our host.

"Taking it for granted that the *Mary* is acting as a store-ship, it is pretty certain," I said, "that Mannering would be more or less at the mercy of her crew. I have no doubt that he pays them handsomely, but at the same time he must know that if it were worth their while they would probably have no hesitation about betraying him. What, therefore, would be more natural than for him to make them join him in some



## 170      The Cruise of the Conqueror

act of piracy which would effectually close their mouths, since then if anything came out, their necks would be as likely to be encircled by the noose as his own?"

"That's a very pretty theory, too," remarked our host.

"You mean to say it is only a theory," I said.

"Exactly," he answered, "and all the theories in the world won't enable us to catch the pirates. Would it help us if we were to learn whether the Prince of Monaco really was on the *Eulalie*?"

"I think it might," I replied after some consideration. "We know where the *Eulalie* was attacked, and it is safe to suppose that if the Prince is a prisoner he would be conveyed to some spot on land or detained in the cabin of the *Mary*. Mannering could certainly not carry him about in the *Conqueror*. If he is on land he is probably on some remote part of the Balearics. If on board the *Mary* he is not out of reach, and, in either case, where he is we shall be certain of finding Mannering."

"Then I think that Palma and not Port Mahon should be our next port. A cable to Monaco would soon settle the matter," Withington said, and the suggestion commended itself to all of us.

Soon after we had arrived at this decision we all turned in, for we were tired out with the events of the day, and I, for one, slept soundly until dawn. When I awakened I knew at once that we were at anchor, for the engines were still and the ship was as steady as a lighthouse. I tumbled out of my bunk and made my

way on deck in my pajamas with the intention of having a dip in the sea if the opportunity offered. When I reached the deck my eyes gazed on as enchanting a view as any one could desire to see. The rays of the rising sun rested on the old Moorish buildings of the capital of Majorca, on the pinnacled towers and flying arches of its great Gothic cathedral, on its numberless windmills and its palms, while in the far distance towered the blue and purple peaks of a range of mountains. The air was soft, the sea dead calm, and without a moment's hesitation I threw off my night attire and took a header from the side. I do not think I ever enjoyed a morning dip more, and for half an hour I played about in the water before clambering on board again quite ready for the cup of coffee which the steward brought me while I dried myself on deck in the sun.

While I was engaged in this occupation Withington made his appearance and began to upbraid me for allowing him to waste time in sleep, while he prepared to follow my example. He was soon in the water and I leaned on the side pelting him with bits of biscuit and smoking a cigarette. When I tired of this interesting occupation I began to look once more at the shore, and to scan the other ships which lay on anchor. There was only one of any size, a two-funnelled steamer. My glance passed over her. Only a measly old tramp, I said to myself. Then I looked at her again. There was a red band round her sides. That surely 'could not be the *Mary*?

## 172      The Cruise of the Conqueror

The thought startled me into instant action. I darted down the companion and cannoned into Forrest at the foot.

"Halloo! What's the hurry?" he shouted. "Any women coming on board?"

I did not answer his badinage, but possessing myself of a glass I hastened on deck and began to look closely at the vessel which had attracted my attention. I could have shouted with exultation when I made out the name and found it was what I suspected, and I could have given a much louder shout when a moment later I saw a man whom I recognized come on to her deck from below. I knew now that we were on the right track, for there, lounging carelessly on the deck of the tramp, a pipe in his mouth, was the German rogue whom I had last seen in the drawing-room of my house at Salcombe.

A voice at my elbow remarked, "I judge from your face that yon steamer is the very boat we are looking for."

I turned and saw Forrest. "Look for yourself," I replied, handing him the glass. "You may see some one on her deck whom you have seen before."

"The red-polled Deutscher as I'm a sinner," he remarked directly he had got the glass focussed to suit his sight. "By Jove! What almighty luck."

"I recognized him at once as Mannering's engineer of the Cross-Channel race and his companion when he visited Salcombe," I said, "but to make quite certain let us ask Sanders."

In response to our summons Sanders came up from below rubbing his eyes, but his drowsiness vanished immediately he heard what we desired of him. He was not long in making up his mind. One glance was sufficient.

"That's the close-lipped, lop-eared chap who was aboard the *Conqueror*. I would swear to him anywhere," he asserted emphatically.

By this time Withington had come aboard and was instantly acquainted with the discovery. His look of amazement showed that the information had taken away his usual *sang-froid*. "Impossible," he said.

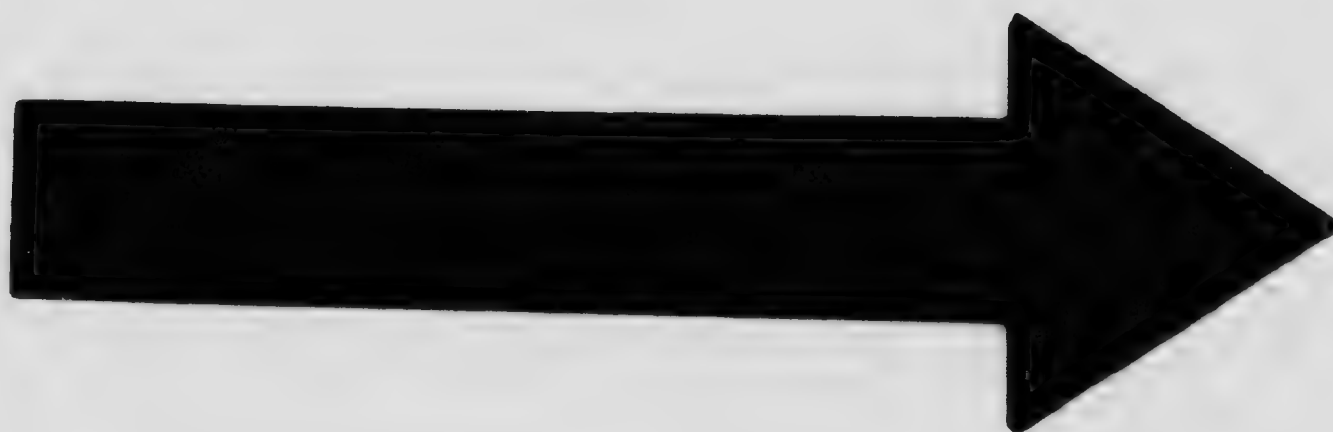
"There are three of us prepared to swear to him," remarked Forrest.

"Then let us be after him at once," said our host eagerly.

"Would it not be more decent," observed Sanders dryly, "if ye and Mr. Sutgrove were to put on a wee bit more clothing, or are ye thinkin' that ye are more awesome-like wi'oot?"

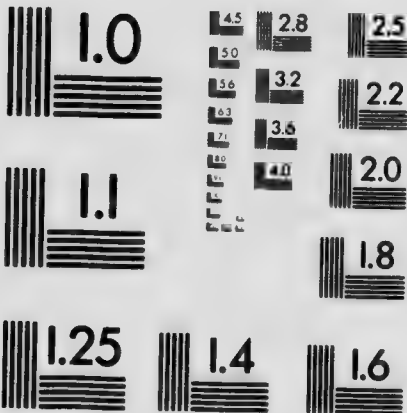
"There's no hurry," remarked Forrest calmly. "By all appearance her fires are banked up and she is in no hurry to be gone. We shall have plenty of time to decide on what course to pursue." Then he turned to me. "What about our theories now, Sutgrove? Do you think Mannering and the Prince of Monaco are aboard that craft?"

I knew not what to think, nor did any of my friends, though we discussed the matter from every point of view over the breakfast-table. In fact we were so un-



# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



**APPLIED IMAGE Inc.**

1653 East Main Street  
Rochester, New York 14609 USA  
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone  
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

## 174      The Cruise of the Conqueror

certain as to what course to adopt that we eventually decided to do nothing except wait and watch. One thing we were certain about. The *Conqueror* was not in Palma Bay, and none of us thought that Mannering would be away from his motor-boat at the same time as the German, and though we were all anxious to lay the man by the heels, we were much more anxious to come to close quarters with the master.

So when breakfast was done and the *Mary* gave no signs of moving we got out a boat and went ashore in order to carry out the original intention which had led us to Palma. Forrest and I went straight to the telegraph office and there despatched our inquiry to a police acquaintance of the detective, giving at the same time a brief and guarded description of the reasons which prompted our desire for information. We had prepaid the reply, and, giving instructions for it to be sent immediately to the Grand Hotel, we strolled through the town to pass away the time with a visit to the cathedral. We did not find the interior very interesting, so we did not linger there. The streets were much more delightful. We could see much of the easy life of the Mallorcans through the doors of the houses. All were wide open, and many a fascinating glimpse of great tiled halls, gay with palms and flowers, and of the orange-trees in the courtyards beyond, did we get as we strolled along. But we were too impatient to do full justice to the beauties of the town, and, after returning to the telegraph office and finding the reply had not been received, we made our way down

to the landing-stage to see whether there were any signs of movement on board the *Mary*.

To say that I was astounded would be to ill express my feelings when I observed the gig of the *Mascot* just on the point of pushing off from the side of the tramp. Withington had the lines in his hand and by his side sat a stranger.

"What the deuce has Withington been doing?" I asked.

"We shall soon see," replied Forrest. "They are coming ashore."



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### WHICH TELLS OF A PIRATE'S CAPACITY FOR LIQUOR

THE astonishment with which I viewed what appeared to me as the establishment of friendly relations with the *Mary* was not shared by Forrest. The detective, indeed, at once fathomed the meaning of Withington's action.

"Now that is what I call a real smart idea on the part of our friend," he said. "Not content with paying a visit of investigation to the *Mary*, he has managed to bring off one of her company for us to pump at leisure."

He was not far wrong in his surmise, as we soon discovered. On landing Withington at once introduced the stranger as Captain Looker. "Finding a fellow countryman on board," he continued, with just a shake of the eyelid which with him did duty for a wink, "I could not resist the temptation of bringing him ashore to wet the acquaintance." He turned to Looker. "You will find my friends here, Mr. Grove and Mr. Brown, quite ready to join us, I am sure."

"Americans?" asked the captain. "No? Well, I find Britishers good shipmates most-ly. I guess I kin drink with them an' smoke with them an' fight with

## A Pirate's Capacity for Liquor 177

them with equal pleasure, which is more than I kin say of the bulk of the inhabitants of the cities this side of the water."

"Well, we will soon get about the drinking and the smoking," I replied with a laugh as we turned towards the town, "and I dare say if you desired a fight we might manage to oblige you."

"Now that's what I call real friendly," he said, "and the first call shall be mine as soon as we reach the hotel. But I must ask you to excuse me for one minute while I find the telegraph office. I reckon I should never have come into this port if I hadn't been compelled to do so by my instructions. I was told that I could pick up some freight just here, but last night when I came ashore to inquire, I found that a low-down Italian hadn't left a box or a bale on the quays. I just wired to Port Mahon to ask if they are in the same case before going round. I may as well save myself the trouble of paying port dues for the fun of the thing."

Forrest and I glanced at each other, but we said nothing and Captain Looker chattered away until we reached the telegraph office. There he stopped at the door and remarked, "Now don't let me detain you gentlemen. I guess I shall find the answer waiting for me."

We waited outside and saw an envelope handed to him, saw him tear it open and read the flimsy paper enclosed within.

"I must get hold of that wire," remarked Forrest.

## 178      The Cruise of the Conqueror

Captain Looker laid it down on a ledge, selected a cigar from his case and, carefully clipping the end with his knife, put it in the corner of his mouth. Then striking a match he lit the cigar. But the weed drew badly, and as the match burnt down to his fingers he dropped it on the corner of the telegraph form and Forrest's desire vanished into air.

"He's done you, old fellow," said Withington.

"Not yet," replied Forrest. "Take no notice if I drop behind," he added hastily as Mr. Looker came out of the door and joined us.

"Now I am just pining for that drink," said the master of the *Mary*, and without more ado we turned away in the direction of the hotel.

At the first corner Forrest stopped to tie his shoe-lace and we had reached the hotel door before Looker remarked upon his absence. "Say," he observed, "you don't tell me your friend is a prohibition man? I guessed he was coming along with us right now."

"You may be assured he will find his way here before very long," I remarked, "I have never yet heard him say no to good liquor."

The captain of the *Mary*, for the first time since we had met him, seemed a trifle uneasy, and I saw his hand move instinctively to his jacket-pocket. But his face cleared when Forrest made his appearance round the corner of the street from which we had just emerged, and he followed me into the hotel with an amount of cool assurance which quite convinced me

## A Pirate's Capacity for Liquor 179

that he was satisfied that he had nothing to fear from us.

Naturally we fostered this confidence by every means in our power, and the swapping of yarns and jokes made the time fly so rapidly that it was quite natural that we should determine to stay where we were for lunch.

Looker was nothing loth to join us, and when the meal was over, suggested another drink before returning to our respective boats. Evidently his idea of wetting an acquaintanceship came perilously near what I should call drowning it, for declaring that he had had enough of the wholesome wine of the country which had been flowing freely from the first, he ordered a bottle of brandy and ladled out a liberal supply of the spirit to each of us, nor would he hear of any excuses. I do not know how Withington felt after a couple of drinks, but already my head was beginning to go round, and although I did my utmost to keep control of my faculties, it was not long before I began to see two captains and found it more than a little difficult to distinguish which was the real one. When, therefore, he filled my glass a third time I feigned to be further advanced than I was in reality, and, sprawling over the table, upset my glass and, letting my head fall on my arms, pretended to sleep.

A little later Withington followed my example, but Forrest did not give in, and sat drinking fairly and squarely with Looker. It was marvellous to me how the detective managed to survive, for I think the cap-

## 180      The Cruise of the Conqueror

tain of the *Mary* was one of the steadiest drinkers I have ever met, and I knew Forrest to be one of the most abstemious of men. But that both of them were in full possession of their faculties I was certain. Forrest was attempting to pump his man in the most insidious style, and the Yankee never by a single answer revealed anything which could be regarded as information.

It must have been two hours after I had given up that at last the captain of the *Mary* rose from his chair and expressed his intention of returning to his ship.

"It has been a pleasant afternoon, sir," he said to Forrest. "I always knew Britishers could drink, but I've not met one who could take his poison like you do for a long while. I hope we shall meet again."

"I most heartily echo that wish," said Forrest as he, too, rose. Then he caught the other by the shoulder, and gave me a rousing shake. "Wake up, Grove, it is time to be moving. Wake up, and say adieu to the old man of the *Mary*."

With what I venture to think was a well-simulated stagger I rose to my feet and feigned ignorance of where I was. Forrest explained again, at the same time apologizing for my incapacity to take full advantage of such an opportunity of being sociable. He went through the same farce with Withington, and the four of us sallied out into the street.

I had found the heat oppressive even in the shade of the hotel, but when we came into the glare of the

## A Pirate's Capacity for Liquor 181

afternoon sun I hardly knew how to bear it. But Forrest and Looker seemed to be quite impervious to the sun; they stepped out briskly in front, leaving Withington and myself to bring up the rear, which we did arm in arm with just sufficient roll in our gait to keep up the illusion of inebriety. I am not quite sure, though, when I come to think over the matter, that the roll was entirely assumed. At all events it would have taken very little to have made it inevitable.

So we came to the quay, where the gig awaited us, and where, too, a boat was awaiting the master of the *May*, and with many verbose farewells we at last embarked in our respective boats and were pulled off to our ships.

I shall never forget the warmth of that afternoon, and it was a real effort to restrain myself from jumping overboard into the sea just as I was. Withington seemed to be in much the same plight, and the perspiration was pouring down Forrest's ruddy face in streams. There was not a breath of air moving.

"Storm before long," said Forrest as we pushed off from the quay.

His voice seemed to remind Withington of something we had all apparently forgotten. "What about the answer to your wire?" he asked.

"Hush!" said Forrest in a quiet voice. "Sound is carried a long way over the water on a still day like this, and our friend there has sharp ears. Curb your impatience until we get aboard. I have a lot to tell you."

## 182      The Cruise of the Conqueror

Once aboard I persuaded him to postpone the telling until I had soaked my head for ten minutes in the coolest water I could get, and when I did seek him in the saloon it was with a wet towel swathed round my head. He laughed when he saw me enter.

"It is all very well for you to indulge your merri-  
ment at my expense," I said, "but if to-morrow morn-  
ing you haven't a head as bad as mine, may I never  
catch our friend Mannering."

"You won't, then, if you depend upon that," he  
replied.

"How you ever managed to last out the sitting,"  
I remarked, "is a mystery to me. If I had not called  
a bye you would have had to send one of the gig's crew  
up to the hotel for me with a wheelbarrow."

"It's easy enough when you know the way," he said,  
"though the remedy is not a particularly pleasant one.  
Whenever I left you for a minute or two I made use  
of the poor man's emetic, and as I always followed the  
treatment by imbibing a quart or so of water, the only  
result has been a sort of internal lavage with a weak  
solution of alcohol."

"I wish to goodness I had thought of some such  
plan," said I heartfully. "But our friend the captain  
must have had a head of iron."

"He was probably playing the same game as my-  
self," replied Forrest. "He was as anxious to make  
us drunk as I was anxious to put him under the table."

"Why, do you think he has any suspicion of us?" I  
asked. "He can never have seen any of us before."

## A Pirate's Capacity for Liquor 183

"When a man is engaged in the sort of game that he is playing he suspects everybody," answered the detective.

"Then you are sure that he is acting with Manner-ing?" I questioned eagerly just as Withington joined us in the saloon.

"Certain," he replied.

"You have found out something?" said our host. "I was beginning to think that we had done the *Mary* an injustice, after all."

"Not much of an injustice," was the dry answer. "Look at that." Forrest held out to us a telegraph form upon which was written, "Rendezvous as instructed Wednesday night. Juan."

"Well?" I asked.

"That is the copy of the wire which Captain Looker told us he was expecting from Port Mahon in reply to an inquiry as to whether there would be any possibility of his obtaining freight for the *Mary*."

"Then Mannering is at Mahon?" cried Withington.

"That cablegram was handed in at Nice on Tuesday night," replied the detective.

Both Withington and I expressed our inability to elucidate the puzzle. "Too much brandy in our heads, I suppose," said my friend.

"Perhaps this will make things clearer," said Forrest, handing us a second telegraph form.

This one had been addressed to Forrest, and leaning over Withington's shoulder I read as follows:—



## 184      The Cruise of the Conqueror

"Letter delivered here yesterday stating Prince in hands of Motor Pirate. Boat left this morning with ransom under guidance of messenger. Communication was in Prince's handwriting and gave twelve hours for decision. In case of any harm happening to messenger or any attempt being made to send a war-ship Prince's life was to be forfeit."

"It is quite easy to see what has happened," continued Forrest when we had digested this amazing piece of news. "Mannering must have attacked the *Eulalie* sometime yesterday morning, probably managing to get on board by some trick or other, a trick, by the way, in which it is certain that the *Mary* must have played a part. Then as soon as the yacht was in his possession and the Prince in his power, he must have put his prisoner on board the *Conqueror* and departed with him. That, as you will see, gives him plenty of time to arrange to exchange the Prince for his weight in gold and to wire to Looker to meet him according to some prearranged plan."

"Then," said Withington, "if we want to meet Mannering all we have to do is to be careful not to lose sight of the *Mary*?"

"Precisely," was Forrest's answer. "Are you certain that the *Mascot* is capable of keeping her under observation? Otherwise it might be as well that we should make some effort to get the port authorities here to detain her."

"Quite certain," said Withington cheerily. "These tramps never do more than twelve knots at the outside,

## A Pirate's Capacity for Liquor 185

and at a pinch I think we could push the *Mascot* along at seventeen."

"That's decided, then," said Forrest, and we went on deck.

There seemed to be no movement on board the *Mary*. Some of her men were lazily lying on the deck, and the barest suspicion of smoke was issuing from her stacks.

"She doesn't look as if she was going to keep an appointment very far away," I could not help remarking.

The master heard what I said and paused beside me. "For all she looks so still," he said, "I'll guarantee she has a good head of steam in her boilers. They must have been feeding the fires as delicately as if they were babies, and though they thought we should not notice it, I think we shall be ready to slip out of harbor at the same moment as they do."

"That won't be till after dark," said Forrest.

There was nothing for it but to exercise patience.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### SHOWS HOW THE CONQUEROR JUSTIFIED HER NAME

IN our impatience it seemed as if the night would never come. Even when the dusk grew upon the face of the waters the *Mary* still lay placidly at her anchorage and her lights were hung out as if she intended to remain there until the morning at least.

Meanwhile with the darkness there had come no mitigation of the heat. Instead it seemed almost to have increased. Nearly the whole of the crew were on deck gasping for air and whistling for the breeze which should bring relief.

Dinner was postponed by mutual consent, and instead we took it in turns to visit the bathroom, where we managed to get a certain temporary relief.

Towards midnight a subtle change took place in the weather. A light mist came rolling in from the sea. We could still distinguish the lights on the *Mary*, but the master began to look troubled, and consulted with Withington as to whether it would not be advisable to drop a boat to hang on the tramp's quarter in case she should take advantage of any temporary thickening to elude us.

In fact Withington had just assented to the adop-

## The Conqueror Justifies Her Name 187

tion of some such course when a thick veil of fog cut her off from our view completely.

"The devil's own luck," grumbled the American. "If we send a boat's crew away now they would never be able to pick us up again."

"Hark!" said the master.

We all listened, but we could hear nothing. "I could have sworn I heard the rattle of a chain, and that could only mean that he is getting in his anchor. There again!"

This time we heard the rattle of iron on wood.

"We will follow his example," said Withington. "Pass the word to get the hawser in softly. There's no need to let the fellow know that we have tumbled to his game."

Meanwhile it seemed to me that the mist had thinned, but looking in the direction of the *Mary* there was no sign of her lights, and I judged I had been mistaken; but a remark of the seaman beside me put me right.

"That fellow took advantage of his opportunity and doused his lights," he muttered. "He can see us all right, knowing very well that it is impossible for us to make him out."

Noiselessly our cable came home and we still listened for any further sound which should tell us that the *Mary* was on the move. It came at last—a light throbbing on the night air that seemed miles away.

"We will give her five minutes," said the master coolly. "There's no use inviting a collision, and she

## 188      The Cruise of the Conqueror

will have to feel her way out with the lead, so we shall not be far behind."

"But," objected Withington, "once outside we are bound to lose her."

"Maybe we shall find it's clearer outside," remarked the master. "Anyway, I'm of opinion this fog will not be lasting very long, and there will be light enough for anything before the night is much older."

"Have your own way," said the American, "there cannot be much less light, anyway."

He was right. The night had grown as dark as Erebus. There was no moon, the stars were covered with a thick mantle of cloud, and through the darkness came and went the sound of the *Mary's* screw in the perplexing manner in which sound is always conveyed in a fog. Gradually the sound died away in the distance, and with the engines running at half-speed we set forth on our quest.

The master may have had a pretty clear idea of our whereabouts, but I am quite certain that I would never have ventured to sea on such a night, motor pirate or no motor pirate. Fortunately, there was no shipping in the bay, with the exception of the *Mary* and ourselves, and rather than lose her we should have been quite content to have come into collision with her. Half an hour passed and the master gave the order to stop the engines, and the *Mascot* lay at rest in the impenetrable darkness while her crew strained their ears for any sound which should warn us of the prox-

## The Conqueror Justifies Her Name 189

imity of our adversary. But not a whisper came through the fog, and Withington muttered a curse.

At this moment a faint puff of air switched the fog aside, and with a sharp word our host ordered the lights to be taken inboard. "The fog will be gone in a minute," he said, "and we may as well let the *Mary* think that she has succeeded in giving us the slip."

Another puff of air came, hot, choking as the first, but driving the mist wreaths before it so that far off on our starboard quarter we could distinguish the lights of the port. But of the *Mary* there was no sign.

"What course?" asked the master.

Withington turned to me. "What do you say, Sutgrove?"

"If he is going to meet Mannering he would be steering northeast once he was clear of the westerly point of the island," I suggested.

"We may as well try that as any other," grumbled Withington, "but I do wish that some of the light Merrick promised us was available."

Almost as if it had been in direct answer to his request there came a flash of lightning so vivid that it practically blinded us. I had seen nothing but the light, and Forrest remarked, "One may have even too much of a good thing." But there were more tutored eyes than ours on the lookout, and before the following thunder had time to speak a voice from the lookout announced that our quarry was in sight.

"Where away?" shouted Withington.

## 190      The Cruise of the Conqueror

"Two points on the port bow and apparently under full steam," was the answer, and immediately the master rang for full speed ahead.

For some little while we had no difficulty in making out the *Mary*, for once the lightning had broken loose, ten seconds did not elapse between the flashes, while sometimes the flicker of light was almost continuous for a minute at a time. At these moments the *Mary* could be seen as clearly as if it had been day. It was also evident that the *Mascot* had been seen and recognized, for the smoke was pouring out of the tramp's stacks, and she was making a big wake as she sped through the calm, oily sea.

"I did not think she could do more than twelve," muttered Withington after he had watched her carefully for some minutes, "but she is holding her own and we are making a good sixteen."

A moment later he was speaking down the tube to the engineer, and bidding him do everything he knew to increase the speed.

But in spite of all efforts, the distance between the *Mary* and the *Mascot* did not decrease. I even fancied that, if anything, the tramp was managing to forge ahead slightly, though in the uncertain sort of light it was difficult to judge with any degree of accuracy. I have often thought of that night's experience since, and though there were more thrilling events to follow, yet the pursuit of the *Mary* while the curious storm was breaking about us left an ineradicable impression on my mind. The sea was calm as a pond. The thun-

## The Conqueror Justifies Her Name 191

der was not at all loud, more like a sullen grumbling of the elements than anything else, yet the lightning was as brilliant as any I had ever seen. It was an uncanny sort of storm. But it was not to endure for ever, and when the change came it was not to our advantage in the pursuit.

Rain began to fall, a dense tropical downpour, and the lightning ceasing, the *Mary* was once more cut off from our sight.

Merrick had taken particular notice of the course she was steering, however, and the *Mascot* was kept on the same course at the top of her speed until the master thought we might be getting into the track of ships bound for Marseilles. Then recognizing the futility of pursuing a phantom ship in black darkness, Withington reluctantly gave the order for half-speed ahead and directed the lights to be swung again.

"It is not the slightest use blundering on to nowhere," he said to us. "If Mannering intends to remain in these waters he is certain to have some port of call, and I can think of no more suitable spot than the Islands. The chances of picking him up thereabouts are infinitely greater than at sea. Besides, after he has met the *Mary* and renewed his supply of petrol he will hardly remain in the Mediterranean. All the fleets of all the Powers will be out after him, and unless he has some place to lie up even his wonderful turn of speed will not save him from capture or destruction."

"What do you propose, then?" asked Forrest.



## 192      The Cruise of the Conqueror

"To put about and make our way leisurely towards Minorca. He is much more likely to find some sort of harbourage for a craft like the *Conqueror* there, or on the coast of one of the smaller islands, than on Majorca."

By this time the rain had ceased, and a pleasant cool breeze following on the storm made us all remember that we had entirely forgotten to dine. "If we cannot find the Motor Pirate there is no need for us to fast," said Withington, and he turned towards the companion hatch. But even as he did so there came a cry forward of "Boat ahead, sir."

With one accord we rushed to the side, and there flashed by us to starboard, leaving as big a wake behind her as the *Mascot* herself, a boat which could be none other than that for which we were on the lookout. It was really only by the foam that we could distinguish her, yet there was no doubt in any of our minds as to her identity, and we were soon to have rather more proof than we wanted that we had found the object for which we were looking.

At the warning cry the men on deck had rushed to the stations allotted to them, and in another moment the rest of the crew came tumbling up from below. Before they had reached their stations, however, there came a slight whistling in the air, something dropped on the deck amidships. There was an explosion, a blinding flash of blue light, and where the starboard Maxim and the two men who were to serve the gun had been, there was nothing. It all happened in an

## The Conqueror Justifies Her Name 193

instant, but — it is one of the most ghastly recollections any man can ever wish to be relieved from — in the brief glare I distinguished the dismembered head of one of the sailors fly past me, and I instinctively ducked to avoid it.

"Out with all lights," shouted Withington, who had sprung to the bridge to take over command from the master. Swiftly the lights were taken inboard, and ringing down to the engine-room for full speed ahead, Withington gave the order to port the helm. His prompt action had the desired result. The next of the deadly shells plumped into the water a few yards astern as we swept round to starboard in the direction of our unseen enemy.

"If we only had a searchlight," said the American as he peered into the darkness, "we might stand a chance of doing something, but at present I'm afraid our enemy has the advantage of us."

For a minute there was silence, then once again one of the deadly shells struck the *Mascot*, this time tearing through her side and wrecking the saloon.

"Damnation," said Withington. "With that pneumatic gun of his there is not even a flash or a report to guide us. I shall have to try a star shell, for otherwise he will sink us without our having fired a shot in return."

The order was given, and with the bursting of the shell we at last gained a view of our adversary. The illumination revealed more than we had anticipated. The *Conqueror* was not more than seven or eight cables'

## 194      The Cruise of the Conqueror

lengths distant, and beyond her, at treble the distance, lay a steamship, which was recognizable at a glance as the *Mary*.

Withington gave a whoop of delight. "We shall have one of them for certain," he cried. "Let 'em have it as hot as you know how."

Ere he had finished the sentence the quick-firer at the fore had begun to speak, and a line of shells followed the flying *Conqueror*. But the narrow mark did not give much opportunity for unpractised gunners. The shells dropped round the rapidly moving boat until the light failed, but none touched her.

"Quick, another rocket," cried Withington.

There was no delay, but it shows how complete the command which Mannering was able to exercise over his motor-boat, and how perfectly he was able to gauge the distance she traversed, by the fact that in those few seconds two more of his deadly shells dropped on our deck, and three more men were numbered amongst the victims.

When the light of the next shell had broken up the darkness we saw that the *Mary* had put about and was steaming away from us, while the *Conqueror* was no longer visible. For a second I thought she had met her doom from one of our shells, but I was soon disillusioned. She had merely shot ahead of her tender and was using the steamer as a screen, emerging from the shelter now and again to discharge an occasional shot at us.

"I'll soon spoil that game for him," said Withing-

## The Conqueror Justifies Her Name 195

ton grimly, and he passed the order forward to direct a couple of shots at the *Mary*. And now we did obtain some result. Both shells took effect and the tramp staggered and fell away from her course, while we could see that there was considerable confusion on her decks.

"Smashed her rudder to splinters," commented Forrest, who had stood beside me hitherto without saying a word. "It is to be hoped that yon steamer is the *Mary*, or otherwise we may be incurring the fate which I had hoped to reserve for Mannering."

"Not much doubt of that," I answered. "See, the *Conqueror* is coming out of his retirement. Mannering intends to draw our fire upon himself."

Once again darkness fell on the water, but another floating magnesium star was speedily requisitioned to give us light to fight by.

But brief as the battle had been, it was not to endure much longer. As if to prove that hitherto he had only been playing with us, Mannering directed upon us a stream of shells, which in less than a minute put an end to the *Mascot's* fighting powers. One bursting in the engine-room lost us control of the ship by smashing the steam steering gear to smithereens. Another dismounted the gun at the fore and smashed the breech, and to cap all, while Withington was ordering the remaining gun to be brought forward, the master came to him and reported that the good old yacht had had a hole knocked in her side big enough for the gig to pass through, and that she could not float for another minute.

## 196      **The Cruise of the Conqueror**

There was only one thing to be done and Withington did it.

“All hands to the boats,” he shouted, “and don’t forget your arms.”

## CHAPTER XX.

### IN WHICH THE MARY MEETS WITH POETIC JUSTICE

I HAVE a very confused idea of what happened during the next few minutes. No more of the magnesium shells had been sent aloft, and I was only conscious of the dark figures brushing past me in the darkness, while the hiss of escaping steam from below made so much racket that my ear could hardly take in the orders which Withington issued continuously. But ultimately I found myself in a boat and pushing off from the side of the *Mascot*.

Suddenly a rocket soared from the deck of the *Mary*. The Pirate had followed our example and sought to throw some light on what was occurring on the dark sea.

I was on the first boat to get away from the sinking yacht, and it struck me as curious that Forrest, seated in the stern-sheets beside me, was selecting a cigar from his case as if he were about to set off on a pleasure excursion. The next thing I observed was that the *Mascot* was obviously settling down by the head, which was no longer pointing in the direction of the *Conqueror* and the *Mary*, both of which now lay rocking lightly on the waters. The long-boat lay alongside the

## 198      The Cruise of the Conqueror

*Mascot*, and Withington was just coming over the side. He paused a moment, and to my surprise, in obedience to some order, a couple of the crew, who had already taken their place at the thwarts, scrambled on board again and ran nimbly aft. To me it seemed the sheerest folly to lose a single moment, but Withington followed the men across the deck as coolly as if there were not the slightest chance of the ship sinking beneath him. His object speedily revealed itself. The breaking away of the *Mascot* from her course had made it possible to bring the aft gun to bear, and it was to make one last attempt at revenging himself on our adversary that caused Withington to risk the danger of being dragged down with the sinking yacht.

Without any waste of time the gun was laid and barked out a last message of defiance. Of course the *Conqueror* escaped. The luck which had followed Mannering in every encounter I had ever had with him, remained with him now. But the *Mary* was not so fortunate. One of our shells hulled her amidships and must have burst among her inflammable cargo. So great seemed Withington's danger that at last I could contain myself no longer, and I shouted aloud to him to hasten his departure from the *Mascot*. He had timed himself with some degree of accuracy, however, leaving at least twenty seconds in which to get aboard his boat and clear the side of the yacht.

It was only when he was clear that the effect of those last few shots became visible. The first warning that anything was occurring came in the sound of a series

## The Mary Meets with Justice 199

of faint explosions borne down the wind from the direction in which the *Mary* lay. Then the darkness was illumined by a faint light which increased with marvellous rapidity. I had been amazed at the speed with which the *Eulalie* had taken fire, but the fate of the *Eulalie* was nothing to that which now overtook the *Mary*. From stem to stern she suddenly burst into flame which roared up above her trucks. Her crew could be seen scurrying like frightened rabbits across her deck and hacking away at the tails of the boats. If they had been instrumental in the destruction of the *Eulalie*, a speedy and terrible retribution had come upon them. Explosion followed explosion continuously as the drums of spirit in the hold burst with the heat. The deck was ripped open, and it seemed as if the only means by which the crew could escape was by throwing themselves into the water. Many of them took the plunge.

But even in the sea they were not safe. As we gazed there was an explosion more violent than any which had preceded it, and in a second the sea all around the doomed ship was turned into a lake of fire. The blazing petrol was hurled far and wide, and the flames apparently spouted from the surface of the water, so that the unfortunate seamen who had plunged for protection into the waves were lapped in the burning flood. Only one boat had got clear of the ship, and even that was overwhelmed in the common destruction. The shrieks of the unfortunate men reached our ears, and with one bound the *Mascot's*



## 200      The Cruise of the Conqueror

boats darted away to relieve those who had escaped such a terrible fate. They might have been pirates, but flesh and blood could not look upon such a scene and not make some attempt to relieve the victims.

Meanwhile, we could not but observe that the man whose mission it ought to have been to do his utmost for his confederates seemed to be far more solicitous for his own welfare. At the first outbreak the *Conqueror* had moved away from the close vicinity of the burning ship, and throughout the terrible ten minutes which succeeded, she remained motionless a couple of cables' length from the scene of the tragedy.

The callousness of the pirate commander won many a deep curse from our men as they strained every nerve and sinew to get near enough to render assistance. The boat in which I and Forrest had escaped was both the nearest to the *Mary* and the lightest, and we were, therefore, well in advance of the others in the race to bring aid to the sufferers. I was urging all our fellows to do their utmost, though heaven knows there was no need to do so, when I heard Forrest's voice in my ear.

"I hope that brute will remain where he is for another couple of minutes, and he will come within range of my revolver, for there is plenty of light now."

Turning my head I looked at the detective's face. It was set and stern, and he was fingering the stock of his weapon almost lovingly.

## The Mary Meets with Justice 201

"Get your pistol ready," he continued. "If my bullets miss, one of yours might find its billet. That infernal scoundrel's luck cannot last for ever."

But whether it was luck or design, Mannering was not on this occasion going to afford us a mark for our pistols. As we approached, we saw him lay his hand on a lever, and the *Conqueror* began to move away from the scene of the tragedy. I was so maddened at the sight that I rose to my feet and shook my revolver furiously in the direction of the retreating motor-boat. My action evidently attracted the attention of one of the two occupants, for the *Conqueror* came to a stop, and it seemed that he was taking stock of us through a glass. Then, laying down the glass, he lifted a megaphone from the well and placed it to his mouth.

The *Conqueror*, as I have already explained, was to windward, so that, in spite of the intervening distance, his words came clearly to our ears.

"So we meet again, Sutgrove," he shouted. "I might have known that it could have been only to you that I owed this pursuit. I am going to let you live this time, though you and every man with you are at my mercy. I am going to let you live — to — suffer." The mocking intonation of his voice was apparent as he continued: "You know something of the *Conqueror's* speed. Don't you think you had better hurry home? Mrs. Sutgrove will not find the spirit of her dear departed so close at hand to protect her as she did on the last occasion when I paid her a

## 202      The Cruise of the Conqueror

visit. If you delay your progress too long you may find that your pretty Evie has decided to cast in her lot with the Motor Pirate after all."

I know it was futile of me to rage, but I could not help hurling at him curses which, if they had had any real effect, would have sufficed to sink his boat without more ado. But with a final mocking adieu he once more touched the lever and the *Conqueror* darted off, and before we had reached the burning ship even the white track of the boat had vanished.

During this brief encounter of words our men had not ceased to pull their hardest. But it seemed as if their efforts were to be fruitless, for although we got near enough to the floating furnace to feel the heat strong upon our cheeks, yet there seemed to be no living soul either upon her or in the water about her. One or two dead bodies we overhauled. They did not appear to be burned, and I fancy that Forrest's theory that they must have been suffocated by the petrol vapour which had so unexpectedly overwhelmed them was the most likely explanation of their death.

We had circled the ship twice, and, giving up hope of rescuing any of the *Mary's* crew, were about to join Withington and the long-boat, when I caught sight of another floating body, and we rowed towards it, though without much expectation that it was more likely to contain life than any of the others we had picked up, only to cast adrift again. This time, however, Forrest thought he detected some signs of life about the man,

## The Mary Meets with Justice 203

and with some difficulty we managed to haul him on board the boat.

"He is alive, and that is just about as much as can be said for him," declared Forrest, as he busied himself in an effort to restore the man to consciousness.

While so employed the long-boat and the gig had joined us, and Withington called a consultation as to the course we had better steer.

"I guess that is pretty near settled for us, without any trouble, by the wind," declared the master, who was in charge of the gig. "There's a fair breeze from the north already, and by daybreak I shouldn't be surprised at getting a capful more."

I had hoped that we might have been able to make the Spanish coast or pick up some ship which would take us into Marseilles where I could get back as rapidly as train could take me to England, for Manner's parting words filled me with apprehension; but it was pretty obvious that such a course was impossible. Our three light boats would never be able to beat up against the wind, and the outcome of our discussion was that we should run as fast as we could for the Balearic Islands, where we could at least cable for assistance, and transmit a warning to my dear ones as to the danger which threatened them. We had also our wounded to consider, and the desirability of getting them under proper surgical care at the earliest possible moment was another element in guiding us to a decision.

## 204      The Cruise of the Conqueror

While we discussed the matter the *Mary* had continued to blaze, and we remained in her vicinity in case the glare should attract the attention of some passing ship and thus relieve us from the necessity of a cruise in the open boats. But when the end came, and the last embers of the tramp were quenched in the waves, we set our heads southwest by south and steered for Minorca, just as the first signs of dawn appeared in the east.

It was a dull dawn, and the duller for all of us by the knowledge that we had been hopelessly defeated by our puny antagonist. All we had to show for our exertion was one man who lay at the bottom of our boat, breathing heavily, but giving no other signs of life. On the other hand, we had lost eight of the men of the *Mascot* killed, while four others were more or less dangerously wounded, we had lost our yacht, and our enemy had sailed away triumphantly upon a new career of mischief.

The morning passed away with nothing to relieve the monotony until our unconscious prisoner at last showed signs of a return to consciousness under Forrest's unremitting exertions. The detective, indeed, looked quite triumphant as he rubbed his hands and remarked, "This chap will live to be hanged after all."

Once restored to consciousness the progress of the rescued man to complete recovery was rapid, and it was not long before he was able to sit up and gaze stupidly about him. When the use of his tongue was restored to him, I was hardly surprised to hear that

## The Mary Meets with Justice 205

his first words were charged with bitter abuse of the commander of the *Conqueror*. There is no need to repeat what he said of Mannering, for the nature of his remarks may be gathered from the fact that, having been one of the first to spring overboard from the *Mary*, he had swum as far as the motor-boat, asking to be taken on board, and had been driven away at the mouth of the revolver. Then, swimming back to the boat which had been launched, he had been caught only in the outskirts of the rain of fire which had proved fatal to all but he, and in his terror he had swum away again, until, seeing the approach of the *Mascot's* boats, he had made various attempts to attract our attention and was at his last gasp when we had at length sighted him.

Seeing the mood he was in, Forrest at once made an effort to extract from him some particulars of what the *Mary* had done, and he had, as it happened, very little difficulty in learning all that the man knew. Glad we were later that we had picked him up, for from no other source could we have learned anything of what proved to be most valuable information.

The first item of interest was the fact that it was on the Minorcan coast that Mannering had found a suitable harbourage for the *Conqueror*. But perhaps it will be as well if I give his story in full. It was not a long one.

The *Mary*, it seems, had left London and made no call anywhere until she had put into Barcelona. Thrice, however, on her voyage she had been hove to, while

## 206      The Cruise of the Conqueror

portions of her cargo were taken from the hold, placed on board a boat, and taken ashore. The first of these stoppages was in the neighbourhood of Finisterre, the second was off a small island on the southern coast of Portugal, while the third was at one of the Balearic group, which we had no difficulty in recognizing as Minorca. At each stoppage Mannering had himself been present, but none of the crew had accompanied the boat which had taken the petrol ashore. Mannering, on board the *Conqueror*, would make his appearance at the appointed place. The petrol would be transshipped to one of the *Mary's* boats, which would disappear in tow of the motor-boat. It was after the third of these unladings that the *Mary* put into Barcelona. There had been nothing the matter with her boilers, and the only object had been to pick up the German engineer. It was in consequence of the information which this person brought with him that Mannering had for the first time come aboard the *Mary*, and had made a proposition to the crew at which they had jumped. It was this proposition which had led to the destruction of the *Eulalie*, and the man's story was so illuminating that I give it in his own words.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### WE ARRIVE AT PORT MAHON

"It were like this," said the man with an accent which labelled him cockney without the possibility of a mistake. "I were down below, avein' turned in for a spell, when some one ollers out, 'Crl 'ands on deck,' and up I goes long er the rest of 'em. 'Wot's hup?' I ses to Spotty Mivins, ee's my mate, yer see. 'Ow the 'ell's I ter know,' ee answers me short like. Anyways we tumbles hup an' gits away forrard, an' there's our old man a-standin' with 'is 'ands in 'is pockets a-whistlin' like ee was a canary, and alongside 'im there was the bloke as was the howner o' that bloomin' fire ship. Leastways the old man ee said so. 'This 'ere gent is yer howner,' ee says, 'an' ee's got a proposition to make to yer,' ee says. 'There's money hin it, an' if yer hon to make a bit, now's yer chanst.'

"Well, there ain't many chances o' makin' a bit er splosh ever comed my way, I can tell yer, and it kind er tickled me to 'ear anybody, let alone a Yank skipper, a-talkin' like that, so I jest grit my teeth ter stop meself from 'ollerin' an' listened like I was at a theayter an' the band's a-playin' soft, like it does when



## 208      The Cruise of the Conqueror

anythin' excitin' 's goin' ter 'appen. An' I 'eard somethin' as fair took away my breath. Straight!

"The bloke, 'im of the motor-boat, ee did the talkin' as if ee were the howner of orl the hearth instead of the *Mary*. 'I jest got a few words ter say ter yer,' ee says 'aughty like, 'which if yer likes some dollars in yer pockets fer a bit of a cruise ashore when this trip is over, yer won't be sorry ter 'ear,' ee says, an' we chips in with 'ear, 'ear.' 'Cap'n Looker 'as told yer as I ham the howner o' the *Mary*,' ee went hon, 'but that probably don't convey much to yer. I'm a-goin' ter tell yer somethin' else about meself,' ee says, an' ee swells 'isself out as if ee was a peacock. 'I'm the Pirate what yer mav 'ave 'eard tell of. The Motor Pirate 'isself an' 't yer ferget it,' ee says, which I won't ter my day, blast 'im. But as I was tellin' yer, ee torks fer a bit about oo ee was an' then he comes ter business. 'I've got a little job on 'and,' ee remarks, 'as might turn out ter be profitable ter orl of us. I've 'eard tell that there's a bloke a-cruisin' hin these waters as 'as got more of the needful than ee knows what ter do with, an' I see no reason,' ee says, 'why we shouldn't touch 'im fer a bit. I suspecks yer 'ave orl 'eard tell er Monty Carlo,' which I 'ave, likewise the man as broke the bank; 'and this 'ere chap is the howner of that little shop. What I propose is,' ee says, 'is ter relieve that gent of some of 'is ill-gotten gains.'

"Well, when I 'ears that I were hon it, an' so were orl the rest er the boys. I ain't much of a pirate me-

self. Fact is, I'm a stoker by trade, but bein' out er a job 'cos the Union chucked me for joinin' as a free labourer when they struck the gas works down ter Becton, I'd signed on fer this trip as the pay hofferred were good. Then ee goes on talkin'. Mind ed me er the Socialist chaps as spouts outside the pubs afore they open on Sundays, ee did. Made me fair feel as if I were doin' a public dooty in 'elpin' ter git me 'ands round some of the ready, not ter say the good time what I looked to when we got back ter the old pals in East 'Am. So ee makes it orl right with us and we were orl sent below not knowin' what we've got ter do, though presently the mate ee comes round an' 'ands out revolvers an' knives case any of us might get 'urt, ee says, which we 'avein' 'ad a fair Saturday night ration er Irish served out ter us were quite ready ter take our chances of, an' we makes for the deck an' stows ourselves away in the boats and under the sides. Our engines were goin' dead slow, an' presently I seen one o' the chaps a-pullin' up little flags an' haulin' of 'em down again, an' Spotty Mivins, ee tells me as they were a-signallin' fer them ter send a boat aboard as we was all 'ands sick an' wanted 'elp. I tell yer if I was a seafarin' man I wouldn't 'a' been took in so easy, but they was fair 'ad first time. I couldn't see anythin', but presently I 'ears the old man 'ailin' 'em, an' after a bit I pipes a boat come along-side, an' presently one pops 'is 'ead over the side an' then another, an' so on till 'arf a dozen of 'em is on the *Mary's* dec Then the Motor Pirate ee steps forrard

## 210      The Cruise of the Conqueror

an' pullin' orf 'is cap mighty polite, ee says ter the first one, 'Hexcuse me, yer 'Ighness,' ee says, 'but I must jest trouble yer to take a little cruise with me.' I don't know whether ee understood, but ee began ter jabber in some foreign language, and the boss he jabbered back so's I couldn't make 'ead nor tail of it. Then ee starts ter go back ter 'is boat, but our chaps was 'andy, an' being taught the way by the old man oo landed one of the chaps as come on board over the 'ead with a belaying-pin an' downed 'im, they was all laid out as reg'lar as nine-pins. Then with a little persuasion with 'is revolver the boss persuaded 'is prisoner to go aboard the boat which was round on the other side from the one ee 'ad come aboard on. 'I leave the yacht ter you,' ee says to our old man, 'an' the less that is left of it the better fer orl yer necks,' an' with that ee goes off."

"Well?" I asked, when the man made a pause at this point.

"That were orl," he answered.

"All!" I said, with surprise.

"Orl as I seen with my own eyes," he replied. "The old man an' I could see as there was a bit of a shindy when they got aboard, but I 'ad nothin' ter do with it."

"But what about the men who were on the deck of the *Mary*?" I queried.

"Some of our chaps must 'ave 'it a bit 'ard," said the man, reluctantly, "an' for fear lest they should come to they dropped 'em overboard d'rectly the old

man came aboard, which we did in a bit of a 'urry 'avein' caught sight of a smoke on the 'orizon an' not wishin' to be caught 'angin' about just there."

"He must have seen us, though we never sighted him," I said to Forrest, who nodded his head in response.

We questioned the man pretty closely, but for some time we could get very little more out of him. He stuck strenuously to the story that he had remained on board the *Mary* while the massacre of the *Eulalie's* crew had taken place. But an idea occurred to Forrest, which, when translated into action, soon made him alter his tone. Taking a pocketbook from his pocket he extracted from between the pages a piece of carbon paper and a sheet of clean white paper.

"I want you to lay your hand on this," he remarked quietly to the man.

"No yer don't, guvnor," was the instantaneous reply. "None of yer finger-print business for me."

"So you have had your marks taken before," said the detective with a quiet smile. "I thought you had been his Majesty's guest at some time or another."

The man shuffled uneasily while he replied, "I dunno what yer gettin' at."

"I'll soon show you," replied Forrest. "Hold him firmly for a minute," he continued, and while I and one of the *Mascot's* men prevented him struggling the detective secured a print of the man's right hand. Then taking from a little bundle of personal belongings, which wrapped in a handkerchief he had placed

## 212      The Cruise of the Conqueror

under the seat, the wedge of wood which had been cut from the rail of the *Eulalie*, he compared the marks.

"This is a piece of luck," he remarked to me after poring over the prints. He turned to the man. "My friend," he said. "It may interest you to know that I have been fortunate enough to have saved the one piece of evidence which will ensure your being hanged at the first port we make. You should not leave your finger-prints about so carelessly when you are engaged in these expeditions."

The man's face took on a ghastly pallor, and the moment his hands were released he clutched at his throat as if he felt the noose already encircling it. "I'll tell you orl," he muttered, "if you will only let us off."

"I cannot do that," replied Forrest, "but if you will only make a clean breast of everything I will do my best for you."

"I will, guvnor," he replied, and he did. Not that what he told us added much to our knowledge. It merely confirmed our theories as to what had happened. He was one of the men who had been sent aboard the *Eulalie* with a drum of petrol, and it was owing purely to his fear lest he should be left behind when the boats were hurriedly recalled to the *Mary*, that we had got aboard the ill-fated vessel, for in his haste he had omitted to carry out his instructions as to firing the ship after soaking the saloon with the petrol. Then of the *Mary's* movements afterwards, we knew quite as much as he was able to tell us, so we at last left him

in peace, merely sending him forward into the bow with one of the *Mascot's* men to watch over him lest he should take it into his head to make an attempt to cheat the gallows.

We soon ceased to trouble ourselves with any such eventuality, however, for as the morning wore away the capful of wind which Merrick had promised us would follow the thunder-storm had increased to such a degree that Forrest and I began to be concerned more with our own safety than that of our prisoner's. Not that there was anything of a gale blowing, but there was enough breeze to raise a nasty sea for small open boats trying to run before the wind. Fortunately both the long-boat and the gig were provided with short poles and a working lug, and so long as we could carry sail there was no danger of the waves overrunning us. What worried us was the fear lest the freshening of the wind should make it imperative for us to put about and ride head on to the seas until the breeze moderated. That would have meant a waste of time which I at least could not face with any prospect of composure. Hour after hour passed and still found us running free without sighting anything to break the monotony of the horizon, and I began to think that we must have miscalculated our position, and, having passed Minorca, were heading straight for the African coast.

Nor was this fear dispelled until late in the afternoon there loomed, cloudlike on the horizon, the blurred outline of Mount Toro. I could have shouted with

## 214      The Cruise of the Conqueror

delight when I recognized that outline, and so, too, could have the rest of our little party, for in the hurry of our embarkation we had provided ourselves with nothing but a little water, and the tightening of our belts was, after all, a poor alternative to a good square meal.

After this I need hardly say that there was no question about our making land as quickly as we could. The couple of reefs we had taken in for the sake of safety were shaken out, and with the sail taut as a drum skin and threatening every moment to pull the mast out of the boat, we raced away towards the line of breakers which soon became visible as we neared land.

In this part of our adventure some of Mannering's luck must have been transferred to us, for it certainly was not through any other cause, unless one has to credit Providence with direct interposition in mortal affairs, that without having to alter our course by so much as half a point we found a little inlet dead ahead of us, in which, within an hour of our sighting the coast, we had safely beached the boat without accident.

Even then our plight was not a happy one. We were on land, it is true, but, so far as we could see, its hospitality was not apparent, for there was no sort of dwelling-place within view, and the chief productions of the soil seemed to be stones and sand. Still, I guessed from the lie of the land and the line of the coast that within an hour or two we ought to get to Port Mahon, so I managed to talk cheerfully to the

men, who at first were not disposed to speak in very complimentary terms of the welcome which the island held for them. Affecting a confidence which I can now admit was mostly assumption, I told them of the warm welcome which shipwrecked mariners invariably received from the Minorquins, and professed my ability to lead them blindfold to a spot where there would be ample provision for all their necessities. They were anxious to set out at once, but I was more than a little anxious as to the fate of the long-boat, upon which Withington, Sanders, and the remainder of the crew of the *Mascot* were embarked. Being so much lighter and carrying proportionately more sail, we had lost sight of them for some time before we had sighted land, and I feared lest they should miss the spot which had provided us with a landing-place and be compelled to run for miles down the coast. So with the ineffective solace of a drink of water I sent a couple of the crew to climb the cliffs while the rest of us gathered together some driftwood and hacked down a bundle of dried-up heath and tamarisk to make a smoke signal should they come within our range of vision. And here again we were singularly favoured by fortune. When, indeed, we had nearly given up hope of them, and I had almost decided to give the word for our departure, our lookout descried them bearing up for the land, and before long we were all engaged in giving a hand to get the wounded ashore and rigging up stretchers upon which to carry them to the habitations of men.

I should think it was just about four in the after-



## 216      The Cruise of the Conqueror

noon when we left the coast and set out in the direction in which we guessed Port Mahon to lie. I do not want ever to make that march again. The heat of the afternoon sun reflected from the sand and rock was something terrific. The road, or rather the way we took, was, after a long climb upwards, a succession of ascents and descents with stones of all sorts and sizes strewn everywhere, some so large that we had to walk round them, others so small that we did not know of their existence until we stumbled over them. Our progress was so slow, having seven wounded men to carry, that it was dark before we hit upon a track at all. But once having done so we managed to make a little better progress, though even then the night was well advanced when we at last came within sight of the lights of a town which I knew could be none other than Port Mahon.

By this time we were ready to drop with fatigue, and when we had discovered the hospital, interviewed the authorities, and safely disposed our wounded men therein, we were all at the last stage of exhaustion. By this time, too, the night was so advanced that, even if we had desired it, there would have been no small difficulty in obtaining the food which we had looked forward to so eagerly when we had started upon our march. All we wanted now was rest and sleep. This Withington managed to secure for everybody by dividing the party between the Fonda del Vapore and the Bustamente, though the resources of these two inns were strained to the utmost to provide the necessary

## We Arrive at Port Mahon 217

accommodation. We just had a long drink of wine to wash down the accompanying *ensiamada* and then we turned in. There would be plenty of time to mature our plans regarding the pursuit of Mannering and the *Conqueror* on the morrow.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### OF THE USE OF A WATCH

I HAD thought that our difficulties would have been at an end when once we were safely housed at Port Mahon, but when we arose the next morning and set about making inquiries as to how we were to extricate ourselves from our embarrassments, I soon discovered that we should have saved time if we had remained in our boats and taken the risk of striking the Spanish coast somewhere in the neighbourhood of Barcelona. I have nothing to say against the kindness and politeness of the Minorquins; indeed, I have only the pleasantest memories of their native land, but they were without exception the most impossible people to deal with, from the business point of view, that I have ever met. Of course, we were not a wealthy-looking party, and with grimy clothing and empty pockets — for in the hurry of our departure from the *Mascot* no one had thought of providing himself with any cash — I can quite understand that total strangers would be chary of giving us credit for the things we desired. Yet, although credit for food, drink, and lodging apparently would be given us to an unlimited extent, our

attempts to raise a few hundred pesetas to enable us to wire to London were quite fruitless. We tried the bank; we appealed to the British consul; we made the most urgent representations to the officials who had taken up the greater part of the morning in obtaining from us full particulars as to how it was we had arrived upon their shores in such a plight, but without the least result. None of them saw the slightest reason for hurrying. When the weekly steamer arrived they would all write to some official or other at Barcelona, and in due course we should be enabled to leave. In imagination we saw ourselves kicking our heels about the streets of Port Mahon for a month at least, while Mannering would be able to continue his nefarious work unchecked so far as we were concerned. I knew too, now he had realized that I was no ghost, that the sooner I found my way back to England the better it would be for my own peace of mind. Mannering was not the man to jib at any risk, however hazardous, and from the time I knew that I had been recognized, the old fear for Evie's safety had come back to me. This recognition, I had learned from our prisoner, had not been made in the first place by Mannering. It had been due to the observation of his German companion when the *Mary* and the *Mascot* had both been lying in Palma Bay. I had never thought that I was in danger of identification on that occasion, but when I did learn it I soon perceived that the knowledge that I was on his track explained a great deal of the events which had happened, amongst others proving that our encounter

## 220      The Cruise of the Conqueror

with the *Conqueror* and the *Mary* had been no chance meeting as most of us had imagined.

Accordingly, I was particularly anxious to get away, and when we had, as I thought, exhausted every source of raising money to pay our passage, I was mad enough to have suggested an attempt to gain possession of the steamer when it arrived, and to compel the captain to take us straight over to Barcelona by force if he would not listen to reason.

We had all gathered together for the discussion of our difficulties when I made the proposal, and Withington jumped at it. Then Forrest, smiling quietly, remarked, "Don't you think you could raise enough to send a wire on the security of your watch?"

It just shows how the man who has never been faced with the necessity of raising cash to meet the eventualities of the moment may be handicapped by his ignorance, for neither Withington nor I had even thought of this simplest of ways out of our difficulty. Without more ado we sought out a jeweller, who, on the security of Withington's watch and my own, made no difficulty about advancing us enough cash for our purpose, and as soon as we handled it we went straight to the telegraph office and sent a wire to Withington's London agent, instructing him to arrange for an immediate payment to us of a sufficient sum to enable us to buy up the island itself if we thought necessary.

I was in some doubt, in view of the largeness of the sum Withington mentioned, whether the agent would not think that an attempt was being made to deplete

the millionaire's banking account by some swindler or other, but he reassured me on the point by explaining that he had prefaced the message with a password which he was accustomed to use in business matters, and which afforded the agent assurance that the message following was genuine. The reply came late that night. It was brief but reassuring. "Business in hand. Apply bank to-morrow morning."

We slept as calmly that night as we had done on the night of our arrival, and as soon as the bank doors were opened the next morning Withington and I entered, to find ourselves greeted with an effusive respect which was not half so pleasing as the unstudied politeness which had been accorded us on the previous day. All the cash in the place was at our disposal, but the sum total was not enough to meet the amount which the manager had been directed to pay to the Señor Withington, though we were assured that sufficient to provide the balance was being sent by the steamer which would arrive later in the day.

Directly we were provided with the cash, our first move was to the telegraph office, and I immediately sent off a message warning Evie that Mannering knew that I was alive and might possibly make another effort to carry her away. Not that I conceived it likely that he would do so, in view of the danger which would accrue to himself if he should make such an attempt, but I thought it well to be on the safe side, and despite myself I could not feel quite sure that the very element of personal risk which would have deterred most men

## 222      The Cruise of the Conqueror

might not prove an additional incentive to him. I added to my message a request that my wife should meet me at our English port of arrival, for I intended to consult her desires before going any further with the chase.

Forrest had the next turn at the telegraph office, and utilized it by sending a *précis* of the information which had come into our possession concerning the landing of petrol. Withington had sought to persuade him to keep the information to ourselves in the fear that it would enable some smart lieutenant in charge of a destroyer to forestall us in the capture of the Pirate, but the detective would not listen to the suggestion. "We have had one taste of his quality," he said. "Let some one else have a chance. I should not be surprised if he does not escape capture for quite long enough a time to give us another opportunity of seeing what we can do."

This latter declaration rather cheered my American friend. He had developed, indeed, as a consequence of our cruise, a determination to see the business through himself. He seemed to think that not only his personal honour but the credit of his nation as well was involved in the capture of the Pirate, and nothing we could say would alter his view.

Shortly after we had despatched the messages the Mahon S. S. Company's packet put in an appearance at the mouth of the harbour, and Withington, hiring a boat, at once went aboard. The substantial arguments at his command worked wonders. They were

sufficient to prevail even over the national desire to procrastinate which afflicted the captain, and the crew were aroused to really wonderful activity. The dozen passengers were landed and the cargo broken up and got ashore so rapidly, that by the time we had settled our hotel bills and drawn the balance to Withington's credit at the bank, the steamer was sounding her siren as a warning that she was ready to start. We did not delay, for I think that every man amongst us was as eager as myself to bid adieu to the Minorquins and their beautiful islands.

I do not suppose that ever before had any one of the Mahon S. S. Company's boats made so speedy a passage as on this occasion, though if the crew had been left to themselves I doubt whether they would have done so well. But Sanders went below and with him the chief engineer and a couple of the men of the *Mascot*, and between them they coaxed the rickety old engines into an exhibition of quality which absolutely startled the captain and enabled us to do the trip in a bare twelve hours.

Before leaving Port Mahon Withington had wired instructions to Barcelona for a special train to be in waiting, for we had calculated that with luck we might manage to intercept the P. and O express from Marseilles at Lyons. So we wasted no time at Barcelona, but directly we were put ashore we hurried to the railway station, and the moment we had taken our seats were whirled away into the night. We did not wait even for a meal, though the scanty fare which



## 224      The Cruise of the Conqueror

alone had been obtainable upon the boat had been too vile to tempt our appetites. Our only desire was to get to our journey's end in order to make a fresh start in the pursuit. Indeed, by this time Mannering had become an obsession with all of us. In our waking moments we discussed nothing but plans for his capture, and I learned from my companions that they, like myself, only fell asleep to dream of him again. We had been careful to bring our prisoner with us, and we examined and cross-examined him continually in the hope of getting further scraps of useful information. We were peculiarly keen for information in regard to the spots where the debarkation of the petrol had taken place, and as to the first of these, he was fortunately able to supply us with fairly definite particulars. He gave us the time the *Mary* had passed the Nore lightship, and the time when she was hove to in order to drop the first consignment of her cargo, so that we could calculate approximately the distance she had traversed by what we already knew of her knottage. Further, he had observed the direction of a light, which, from his description, we had no difficulty in recognizing as the Finisterre beacon. Putting all the facts together, it seemed to us that the search for the Pirate's lair narrowed itself down to an examination of a dozen miles of coast, and that sooner or later we could not help discovering it.

Our hopes grew higher when we found that we had managed to catch the express at Lyons, though we only ran in a minute or two before its arrival.

Fortunately there was a restaurant-car attached to the express, and it need scarcely be said that we sat down to a meal with hearty satisfaction. We made amends then for our long abstinence, and one result, at least, so far as I was concerned, was the inducement of a pleasing condition of somnolence which lasted until our arrival at Paris. Here we had a few minutes to spare, and we utilized them in wiring a few messages. I had already wired Evie from the frontier at Carlton another message from me giving the time and port of my arrival, and now I despatched a wire to the hotel, telling her that she might expect me that night.

We had been very lavish with our telegrams in fact. Withington spent all his waking moments in drafting messages, and whenever the train had stopped he had made a rush for the telegraph office to send off a fresh despatch. When I had questioned him as to what necessity there was for such a lavish use of the wires, he merely smiled and remarked, "I am making arrangements for our next cruise," but nothing more could be got out of him. At Paris he received a reply which must have contained some satisfactory information to judge by his pleased expression, but whatever it was he was only roused thereby to further efforts, and the telegram he sent in answer was nearly a thousand words in length, and the telegraphist took so long to calculate the cost that our friend all but missed the train in consequence. He came flying through the barrier just as the horn sounded, and the

## 226      The Cruise of the Conqueror

guard who helped him on as we moved off would, I am sure, have refused to do so if he had not been dazzled by the sight of the five-franc piece which the American held between his forefinger and thumb.

I do not know what the rest of the passengers must have thought of our party. With nearly a week's growth of beard sprouting on our chins, with dirty linen, torn clothing, and many of us sporting bandages over slight injuries sustained from splinters, we must have appeared to be a disreputable band of adventurers. I should not have been surprised had the authorities taken it into their heads to detain us for inquiries, but gold is a wonderful passport, and there was no fear of Withington's supply of the commodity giving out.

We were well up to time at Boulogne, and once embarked on the boat I breathed a sigh of relief. Our journey from Barcelona had cut the record, and I judged that it would be impossible for Mannering to have carried out his declared intention of preceding me. Nevertheless I spent the hour of crossing in pacing the deck and watching for the appearance of the Folkestone lights as if by that means I could hasten our progress, and when we came alongside the pier I was the first to cross the gangway. There was the usual crowd assembled, and elbowing my way through made for the telegraph office in the hope that I should at last receive a message from my wife.

I had not gone a dozen yards before I pulled up short. There in the full glare of a lamp was either my

wife or her double. I could not be mistaken, for accompanying her were my little daughter and Edith Withington.

"Evie," I said, as I approached.

She glanced at me doubtfully, but her doubt as to my personality was only momentary. "Don't you know me?" I asked.

My voice was sufficient revelation. "Jim!" she answered. "Jim! I'm so glad you are back, Jim. So glad — so glad," she repeated, half laughing and half crying.

I did not say anything for a couple of minutes or so, and it was not until we were safely ensconced in a railway carriage that our talk became coherent. The boat had been rather crowded that evening with returning holiday makers, but with Withington and Forrest we managed to get a compartment to ourselves, and directly we were off I remarked, as I drew my little girl on to my knee: "What made mother bring you with her, little one?"

"I wanted to come," she answered, "and mother's afraid."

"Afraid?" I said, looking at Evie. "Afraid of what?"

Then my wife, repeating again the words with which she had greeted me, replied, "I am so glad you are home again, Jim. Mannering is in England."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE PIRATE INVITES EVIE TO DINNER

I CANNOT say that I was overwhelmed with surprise by the news Evie gave me of Mannering's presence in England, but her statement had the effect of a thunderclap upon Withington and Forrest.

"Mannering in England? Impossible!" ejaculated the former, and "Impossible!" also echoed the latter.

"It may seem impossible to you," replied my wife, "but that it is a fact I will soon prove to you."

"When I say that I can scarcely credit it," said Withington, "I hope you will not think I am impugning your veracity, Mrs. Sutgrove?"

"You had better not," chimed in his daughter, "for I am one of the witnesses to his presence here, having seen him with my own eyes, and having failed only by the merest chance to speak to him."

"Really!" said Withington. For a few moments he was too astonished to say more. Then he added: "Are you quite sure of his identity? You see it is only four days ago that he was in the Mediterranean to our certain knowledge, and that he could have managed to run the gauntlet of the people who were on the lookout for him and his piratical craft is inconceivable."

## The Pirate Invites Evie to Dinner 229

"As to how he may have managed I can offer no explanation," replied Evie, "but he must have succeeded somehow, for I am as certain of the fact that twenty-four hours ago he was in London as I am of my own existence."

"In London?" I gasped.

"And for all I know he may still be in London," said Edith Withington.

"Then why in heaven's name have you not given particulars to the police?" asked her father.

"We have done so," replied the fair American, with a disdainful shrug of her shoulders; "but I guess they came to the conclusion that we were a pair of lunatics just escaped from a retreat, or else two sweet notoriety hunters anxious to make a sensation, for they all looked at us just as Mr. Forrest is looking at us now. Whatever he may say, I am sure he has his own private opinion as to our sanity."

Forrest laughed at the attack upon him before replying: "You do me an injustice, Miss Withington. I have no doubt as to your perfect sanity, but at the same time I might, perhaps, be excused from thinking that there is a possibility of both Mrs. Sutgrove and yourself being misled by a physical resemblance in some other person."

"I guess you had better tell the whole story right now, Evie," said the girl, turning to my wife. "There's enough circumstantial evidence for even an American jury to be found in the happenings of the past three days."

## 230      The Cruise of the Conqueror

"Three days," said Withington; "that settles it. Mannering could not have got here in the time even without counting the necessary stoppages to fill his tanks. Swift as she is, the *Conqueror* couldn't perform the feat."

His daughter rose and placed her hand on his mouth.

"You dear old goose," she said. "How often have you told me that the most futile form of intellectual exertion is the attempt to explain away facts because they do not happen to fit in with our preconceived theories."

"If they are facts, Miss Impertinence," said her father, laughing.

"Well, you wait and hear," she answered. And he settled himself back in his corner to listen.

"When you left us," began Evie, "we obeyed instructions, and the same day departed for Norfolk like a dutiful wife —"

"And a dutiful daughter," interpolated Edith Withington.

"And at Sutgrove Hall we managed to pass away the time pleasantly enough. Nothing happened. Day succeeded day, and we felt as secure as ——"

"Cabbages," remarked the girl, "and just about as lively."

"Edith was always bewailing the fact that she had not been allowed to accompany you," continued my wife, smiling, "but it was fortunate that she remained with me. Still, I shall come to that later on. Well, nothing happened until Wednesday last."

## The Pirate Invites Evie to Dinner 231

"To-day is Friday, isn't it?" I asked, for the past few days had been so crowded that I was rather hazy in my mind as to the exact day of the week.

"Yes, to-day is Friday," replied Evie, "and it was on Wednesday morning that I received a letter by the first post marked with the Dover postmark." She opened a bag she had with her, and extracting an envelope therefrom handed it to me. "You read it, Jim," she said.

I took the letter from her hand and did as I was bidden. It was written on plain paper and was merely dated Wednesday. "Dear Mrs. Sutgrove," I read, "You will possibly be surprised at hearing from me, and still more astonished at learning that I have taken advantage of an impression, fostered by some recent events, that I am at the present moment in the Mediterranean to once again pay a visit to England. You may acquit me of folly in acquainting you of my arrival in a country where I might reasonably expect a welcome too warm to be pleasant, for when you have read this letter to the end you will see that you are the one person in the world upon whom I may safely depend to respect my *incognito*. Perhaps, however, it may be as well to explain my reasons for this belief forthwith, though I cannot do so until I have congratulated you upon your exceedingly clever piece of acting when last I paid you a visit. I frankly confess that you imposed upon me successfully. From sources of information at my disposal I had learned of Mr. Sutgrove's disappearance, and I had thought



## 232      The Cruise of the Conqueror

that the world was rid of one booby at least. I am no believer in a future existence, but for the moment I was staggered when in answer to your invocation your husband made so prompt an appearance. Afterwards, when I came to consider the question in the cool light of reason, I was able to arrive at a juster appreciation of the state of affairs. Perhaps I am wrong in calling Sutgrove a booby, for his little plot was neatly conceived. Yet — no, he does deserve the term. He has sufficient acquaintance with me to know that I should certainly redeem my promise to see you, and if he had watched, as I should have watched under such circumstances, he could easily have finished my career with a pistol-shot — if his hand had not shaken. He is not worthy of you, Evie, or he would have relieved himself of me. And this brings me to the point of this letter. He had his chance then; now it is my turn. Yes, let me repeat my words. It is my turn now. S' 'grove is in my power absolutely. He and his American friend — as big a blunderer as himself — are safely hidden away in a retreat which I had designed for my own safety in case pursuit should have become too hot at any time, and I will defy any one to find him. It was folly on his part to leave you unprotected. It was still greater folly to think that he could succeed in capturing me. I suppose he thought that I should still suspect him to be defunct — like most unintelligent persons, he obviously credits his adversary with a lack of intelligence equal to his own. Thus it happened

## The Pirate Invites Evie to Dinner 233

that he gave himself deliberately into my hands. There is no need for me to enter into details at this moment; all I need say is that the *Mascot* is at the bottom of the sea, together with the greater portion of her crew. Theirs was the fate which falls inevitably upon the blind followers of the blind. Now do not think that I am writing all this in any spirit of boastfulness. I have too great a contempt for my fellow creatures to set much store upon the easy victories I achieve over them when they set themselves to thwart my enterprises. My object in telling you is quite different. Our conversation, when we met a few weeks ago, was interrupted, and I desire to finish it. On that occasion I sought you; this time I desire that you shall come to me. I think you will come when I assure you that any failure to comply with my desire will be visited upon Sutgrove. As to the place of our meeting, I have a fancy for concluding the interrupted conversation at the very spot where it was broken off. I have been examining the time-tables, and I find that it will not be difficult for you to accede to my wishes. This letter will reach you on the Wednesday morning. If you catch the ten o'clock train from Cromer to St. Pancras you will be able to join the West of England express at Paddington, and thus be able to meet me at Salcombe to-morrow evening. It will, of course, occur to you that in making this assignation I am placing myself to some extent in your power. I am perfectly aware of the fact, and, since I have no intention of losing my liberty or my life, let

## 234      The Cruise of the Conqueror

me remind you once again that if anything happens to me your husband's life will pay forfeit. Of course, if you have no regard for him, I shall not hesitate to at once act on the assumption that your failure to respond to my summons is a practical request that you shall be set at liberty from your ties, and I shall, after executing your desires, take an opportunity of communicating with you again later on. There is much more that I wish to say, but I may as well leave it until we meet, and, meanwhile, let me assure you that in no respect will you find any change in yours devotedly, Randolph Mannering."

I crushed the letter in my hand when I had finished reading it, for the anger it bred in me was too great for expression. No one, indeed, said a word, and the only sound was a rattle of the train as we sped onwards through the night.

"It was lucky you did not go," I said to my wife a little later.

"Jim," she replied earnestly, "do you think that I should fail in courage to keep an appointment with anybody when your life was at stake?"

"But it was not," I argued. "You could not have really thought me foolish enough to have allowed myself to fall into his clutches?"

"I had very little time to think," she replied. "Besides, by the time I had finished reading that letter, there was only room in my mind for one thing. I had to relieve myself of my anxiety regarding you."

What could I say in reply. It was impossible to

## The Pirate Invites Evie to Dinner 235

give utterance to the fear at the back of my mind, but every man of decent feeling will know how to interpret my thoughts. It was with the most poignant anxiety, therefore, that I waited for her to continue.

"I was not afraid of him, Jim," she said, looking fearlessly into my eyes. "Do you know that I feel much more afraid of you when I see so strange a look on your face. Surely you must know that you could trust to me. I took with me the little pistol you gave me before you left, and I saw that it was loaded in all five chambers."

There was a proud, confident ring in her voice, and, at sound of it, and at her fearless glance, all my horrible fears vanished.

"I am afraid I have never realized how strong you are, dear," I replied, humbly.

Then I think we must have both forgotten that we were not alone, for a minute later I awoke to the fact Withington and Forrest were looking out of the windows into the night, and with a word of apology I asked Evie to continue her story.

"You can see that there was little enough time for any deliberation if I was to keep the appointment," she said. "Only just sufficient, in fact, to tell Edith all the details and confide our baby to her care before driving off to catch the Cromer train. I arrived at the station with five minutes to spare, and I chafed at the delay, for fear that the train might be late, and that I should miss the Great Western express. As things turned out, I need not have worried myself, for at

## 236      The Cruise of the Conqueror

Cambridge a telegraph boy was walking along the platform, shouting my name into every window, while he held an orange envelope aloft."

"Miss Withington had received the wire I sent you and telegraphed to stop you, thank heaven," I cried.

"No," replied my wife. "Your wire had not arrived by then. This is the telegram I received." She handed me the flimsy piece of paper, and this, too, I read aloud:

"Have found it will be more convenient for me to meet you in town, and shall be glad to save you the fatigue of a longer journey. Will you dine with me at the Carlton, where I have booked a table for seven o'clock prompt in your name? Take this as an assurance that you have no personal cause for alarm. — M."

"Astounding!" commented Withington, and even Forrest was startled into utterance of a low whistle.

"He seems to delight in thrusting his head into the lion's jaws," I remarked.

"I don't think he ever intended to go to Salcombe," said my wife. "I guessed at once that the assignation he made was merely intended to throw everybody off the scent, in case I should have communicated the contents of his letter to any one instead of keeping the appointment myself. However, it was something of a relief to me to think that I was to meet him in London instead of in a deserted country-house, and it was with a perfect assurance of my own safety that, on reaching St. Pancras, I drove at once to the Carlton. I found the rooms we usually occupy when we

## The Pirate Invites Evie to Dinner 237

stay there were disengaged, and, after sending a telegram to Edith to tell her of my change of plan, I sat down to wait as patiently as I could the hour of the appointment. It was not easy to be patient, for, when I thought over the matter, it seemed to me that Mannering would never have ventured upon such a step unless he really had you in his power, and I learned almost immediately after my arrival that a table had been booked for dinner as stated in the telegram. The afternoon passed in a very wearisome manner, and at five minutes to seven I went down-stairs. I was just stepping out of the lift when I heard a cry of 'Mamma!' and to my surprise my own little darling threw herself into my arms, and I heard Edith's voice, asking: 'How did you manage to get here first? I thought my wire would not have stopped you before reaching Bath.'

"'Your wire?' I asked.

"'Yes,' she said, 'haven't you received it?'

"For a moment I was furious, thinking that the telegram you have just read came from Edith, and that Mannering would place his own interpretation upon my failure to keep the appointment."

"You see," interrupted Edith Withington, turning to me, "your telegram from Port Mahon did not arrive until after lunch, and I could see from the timetable that there would be no chance of stopping Evie until after she had left Paddington, so I wired news of your safety to every station that the West of England express stopped at, and told her that I was

## 238      The Cruise of the Conqueror

coming on to the Carlton and that I would await her there. She was just mad for a second, but I brought out your message and she was all honey and smiles in a moment. I don't really think you are worth so much affection, Mr. Sutgrove."

"I am quite sure I am not," I answered.

"Such modesty!" laughed my wife. "But it was lucky for me that Edith had acted promptly, so that I was warned in time. With just a little more luck we might have had the credit of capturing the Pirate."

"Then he turned up, after all?" I cried, incredulously.

"Of course he did," replied Evie, in a most matter-of-fact tone. "While I was talking to Edith, my eyes were all the time on the entrance. A hansom drew up, and a man jumped out. He entered the vestibule and began to advance towards me. I recognized him in spite of the fact that his hair was fair instead of dark. 'There he is,' I cried.

"'Who?' asked Edith, for I had not then had time to explain how I came to be stopping at the hotel.

"'Mannering, Mannering himself,' I answered. I was so excited that my voice could be heard all over the hall, and everybody stopped and looked at me. Mannering heard as well as the other people about, and, turning on his heel, passed again through the door. We both rushed after him, but before we could do anything, he had jumped into the cab which was just moving away, and the driver whipped up his horse. He had escaped."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE PIRATE STILL LINGERS IN LONDON

At this point in the story Edith Withington, at my wife's request, took up the narration.

"If that porter at the door had been in full possession of his senses, we should none of us have had any more trouble with the Motor Pirate," she declared. "I called to him to stop Mannering, but, instead of doing so, he just held me."

"Well, you can hardly blame the commissionaire for his choice," I said, laughing.

"I fancy that a couple of hours later, when I gave him an American opinion on the stupidity of the male sex in general, and of the English male in particular, he wished he had held the Pirate," said the American girl. "But that was afterwards. At the moment we had no time to spare for expressing our opinions. When we saw that he had escaped, we managed to persuade the porter that we were in need of a cab right then. By the time he had whistled one up, I had explained to Evie that the best thing for us to do was to go straight away to the police office and set some one on his track, and I expressed the opinion that, if your police did not get hold of him before he left



## 240 The Cruise of the Conqueror

this city of theirs, that they ought to send for some of Pinkerton's men to teach them their business.

"Anyway, when once persuaded of your safety, Mr Sutgrove, your wife soon saw that it was her duty to tell the story, and off we drove to Scotland Yard long before the porter had recovered from his astonishment at our unheard-of proceedings. I know you I was just keen on getting that man caught but — she turned to the detective — "I am sorry that I didn't see any evidences of business in the representatives of your profession Mr. Forrest."

"I am sorry for that," he replied smiling.

"And well you may be," she retorted. "They do say that our people are too fond of the green dollar, but give me an American all the time."

"Why, what occurred?" asked the detective.

"I'll tell you," said the girl. "First the man at the door seemed determined to know the whole of our business, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that we could persuade him that we wanted to confide our story to the head of the detective department and not to him."

"He was polite, I hope?" said Forrest.

"Oh, yes," she answered. "He smiled as if he was piloting us across a river. Next morning, but all the same it was some time before we could convince him that we had not come there especially to interview him. Ultimately he took us up-stairs and along a passage, and sent us up in a little room with a couple of chairs and a table. There we remained

## The Pirate Lingers in London 241

for nearly five minutes. I wanted to go outside and find some one, but Evie said it was usual in England to keep everybody waiting for at least ten minutes in all Government offices. At last some one did come. I guess if they were to have such a sleepy-looking young man in the force in New York, he would soon be told to look out for another billet. He had a piece of paper and a pencil in his hand, and he asked us our business in a tone which suggested that for any one to disturb him at eight o'clock in the evening was a crime which could only be punished by twelve months' imprisonment at the least. It was lucky for him that he did not stop long, or I should have said something to make him jump, but, as soon as he heard our names, he half-closed his eyes, and, remarking that perhaps we had to see the inspector on duty, he simply dreamed himself away out of the room. We had not long to wait before a second man made his appearance, but, though he did look awake, he seemed to be just as casual as the first. He listened to what we had to say, read the letters and telegram, asked two or three questions, and then opened the door for us to go."

"What did you expect?" asked Forrest, with a renewal of his smile.

"I don't know that I expected anything except a sign of — well, call it intelligent activity. As it there seemed to me to be no more signs of about Scotland Yard than there are in the grandfather's clock. Even when I told the in that less than half an hour previously Manner

## 242      The Cruise of the Conqueror

driven away from the Carlton in a cab, he only asked us if either of us had noticed the number of the cab, as if that mattered."

"I suppose neither of you had noticed it," said Forrest.

"Of course we had not," she answered. "People never do notice things like that. Why, when we returned to the hotel I remember there was a man in the vestibule asking the porter if he had remembered the number of another cab which had arrived there that evening."

"Another cab?" asked Forrest, quietly. "It did not occur to you, Miss Withington, that the man in the vestibule might have been a detective officer trying to obtain the information you had been unable to give."

"It could not have been," she answered. "Our cabman was waiting for us and we drove straight back."

"I expect the casual gentleman managed to instruct another man to go straight to the Carlton, and he would possibly get there before you did," explained the detective. "You see the cabman's number would be of the utmost importance. Mannering would probably be driving to some railway station, and, as the numbers of cabs entering the railway stations are recorded, if this detail had been noted it might have led to his arrest."

Edith Withington stared at him. "Well," she said, after a pause, "your people are possibly smarter than I thought, but they failed to capture the Pirate on

## The Pirate Lingers in London 243

this occasion. You haven't seen to-day's papers, I suppose?"

"Not had a chance yet," said Withington.

"Then you just look here," said the girl, dramatically, as she unfolded a paper and held it out so that we could all see the staring headlines which announced a startling piece of news.

What we read was this:—

### "LONDON BLOCKADED.

"MOTOR PIRATE AT THE MOUTH OF THE THAMES.

"Ship Bombarded at the Nore.

"*Our Special Correspondent wires from Tilbury:—*

The S. S. *Mosquito*, from New York to London, has just sent a boat ashore at Tilbury to report having been waylaid early this morning by an armed boat and compelled to transfer to her a portion of her cargo. The *Mosquito* is an iron steamship of 2,000 tons, laden with a cargo of motor spirit. Her captain at first treated the demand to heave to made by the two occupants of the boat as a jest, until he was fired upon with shell and compelled to heave to in order to avoid being sunk. After filling her tanks, the motor-boat left, towing two of the *Mosquito's* boats laden with drums of petrol, steering a northeasterly course. Two of the *Mosquito's* crew were killed and two wounded by the shell fire."

Here was new matter for speculation. There was no longer room for doubt in any of our minds that

## 244      The Cruise of the Conqueror

Mannering had really been in London and was now hovering somewhere in the North Sea. Nobody but he would have exhibited such an audacious defiance of danger. Yet how he had managed to cover the distance in the short time remained as difficult of explanation as ever. But in our discussion of the matter Forrest came to the rescue with an explanation which was plausible, and which after investigation proved to be the true explanation.

"It is never any use," he remarked, "looking for extraordinary solutions for a mystery when a commonplace one is available. It seems clear that Mannering was at Dover on Tuesday night or Wednesday morning. What was there to prevent him having arrived there in the ordinary way by the Calais-Dover boat if he had landed near Marseilles and taken train?"

"He could not have brought the *Conqueror* overland with him," objected Withington.

"Granted," said Forrest. "But the *Conqueror* was not apparently seen until this morning, thus allowing plenty of time for the German to have brought the boat round to some prearranged rendezvous without being observed."

"Anyhow, it is not much use discussing what he has done in the past," said Withington. "It would interest me a great deal more if we could get some idea as to where he was to be found in the immediate future."

I looked at him in some surprise while I remarked, a trifle bitterly: "One subject seems to me as interest-

## The Pirate Lingers in London 245

ing as the other. So far as we are concerned we are out of the game. Even if we had a boat to equal the *Conqueror* in speed, Mannering would manage to give us the slip. He is as elusive as a will-o'-the-wisp."

"You would never become a millionaire," replied Withington. "You are not optimistic enough."

"There is a point at which optimism becomes folly," I answered, sententiously.

"Never," he replied. "You may take my word that in every enterprise in which he engages, the optimist comes out top dog."

"You mean that the man who does not know when he is beaten is bound to win in the end?" I asked.

"Not precisely that," he said, "but if you put it that the man who is not deterred from pursuing the course he has mapped out by any reverses he may meet with, is bound sooner or later to reach the goal he is looking for, I shall accept the statement."

"If you apply your argument to Mannering, where do we come in?" I asked.

"Fairly put," laughed my friend. "But as the goal at which Mannering is aiming, so far as I can see, is the gallows, I am not so certain that our endeavours to bring about his capture will not assist all parties to attain their ambitions. Anyhow, I am more determined than ever not to rest until I have run him to earth."

I shrugged my shoulders, for I was inclined to throw up the whole business. The rush of the past few days had made me feel that a little peaceful retirement

## 246      The Cruise of the Conqueror

would be a very desirable thing. There is a point at which excitement palls, and I was not a jaded millionaire who had found a new sensation. So I remarked: "It is all very well to talk, but unless we can persuade the Admiralty to loan us a destroyer, it seems to me folly to continue the pursuit."

"Oh ye of little faith," said the American, "have you forgotten that for the removal of all difficulties there is one magic talisman, that the simple word dollar has more power than any of the spells of the old magicians? I shall be vastly annoyed if my agent does not inform me on our arrival in town that, in execution of my cabled instructions, there is a vessel waiting at Southampton ready to weigh anchor the moment we step aboard."

"By Jove! You are a real sportsman, Mr. Withington," said Forrest.

There was so much enthusiasm expressed in the tone of the detective's voice that my sluggish inclination was stirred thereby.

"I wondered why you wanted to talk over the wires to such an extent," continued Forrest, "for I did not think that an immediate continuation of the pursuit was in your mind."

"I guess when once we Amurricans put our dollars into a business," replied Withington, assuming a Yankee twang which was but rarely noticeable in his speech, "that we do so with the intention of making that business hum. And, either the business hums or the dollars give out."

## The Pirate Lingers in London 247

"Not much chance of the dollars giving out on this occasion," remarked Forrest, dryly.

"If they were likely to do so," continued Withington, "they would be planked down all the same. That Motor Pirate has scored once, maybe he will score twice, but if I don't get home on him on the third occasion you can put me up for a dandy block in a cloth-cutter's window, with a label round my neck, 'The millionaire that failed.'"

"Spoken like my own father," ejaculated Edith Withington, her whole face sparkling with delight. "Only this time you must take me with you. You cannot manage alone, it is clear."

Withington's face became grave, and he looked at me. "No," he said.

"But indeed you must take me," she urged. "There is no real danger. You have all come home safe."

"Not quite all of us," he replied, and in a few succinct phrases he narrated the main incidents of our trip. He turned to my wife when he had finished. "You at least will see, Mrs. Sutgrove, how impossible it is for Edith to come with us."

"Yes," she said. She looked at him for a moment, then she turned to me. "But I think you must find room for me on this expedition," she added, quietly.

Of course, I began straightway to make objection, but she was firm in her determination. "It is clear now," she urged, "that Mannering is as much to be feared in London as anywhere else, and I shall only feel quite safe while I am near you."



## 248      The Cruise of the Conqueror

The argument which ensued was only interrupted by our arrival at Charing Cross and there our party broke up. Withington was met by his agent and remained to make arrangements for the crew of the *Mascot*. Forrest took charge of the prisoner we had brought with us, explaining that he would first have to place him in safe custody, and then report himself at headquarters, though he hoped to look us up later in the night. Then my wife and I, with our child, drove off to the hotel, leaving the Withingtons to follow us as soon as the arrangements for the men were completed. A couple of minutes later we were put down, and, pausing to pay the cabman, I followed Evie in. But my entrance was barred by a stalwart commissionaire, who held out his arm as he remarked, "Not this way, my man."

I am usually somewhat particular about my attire, but my mind had been so fully occupied that until this *contretemps* I had not given a thought as to what effect my unshaven and generally dishevelled appearance was likely to produce on beholders. I was still wearing the clothes in which I had landed on the Minorquin coast, and I at once realized that the commissionaire regarded me as a particularly ruffianly sample of the cab-runner. Fortunately Evie, looking back to see why I was not following, perceived my predicament and came to my rescue. We were still laughing over the matter when we entered the sitting-room of our suite. An envelope addressed to me was lying on the table.

## The Pirate Lingers in London 249

"Hullo!" I said. "Information of my arrival seems to have got to somebody's ears pretty quickly," for the envelope was stamped and had evidently been delivered by hand. I tore it open carelessly. But as I read the contents my carelessness vanished. What I read was this:—

"Beware. I have spared you twice. The third time I shall have no mercy. Your fate is in your own hands.

"RANDOLPH MANNERING."

## CHAPTER XXV.

### WE RENEW THE PURSUIT

To say that I was astounded at finding this message from Mannering lying on my table on the very night of my return would be but a mild way of expressing the astonishment I felt. I could only look helplessly at Evie and ask absurd questions as to how it came there.

"We can soon find out," she replied, as she turned in the most practical manner to the bell. "Meanwhile, Jim," she remarked, "the first thing for you to do is to make yourself a respectable figure. If you only knew what a disreputable object you present, you would not delay a moment before having a bath, at least."

"But that note," I said. "Mannering must be in London again. I must go and find Forrest. I ——"

She stopped me at once. "Who do you think would listen to you or imagine for an instant that you were Mr. James Sutgrove? Look at yourself in the mirror."

I did so, and I knew that my wife was right. "I have no other clothes, though," I said.

"Now you will at last have an opportunity of knowing what a really thoughtful wife you married seven

years ago," she answered. "I wired yesterday for your clothes to be sent on in case you should have forgotten your luggage."

Her manner was so perfectly calm, her voice so even, that I realized that the message from Mannering had not affected her in the slightest degree.

"I knew all that years ago," I replied, as I departed at once to make the necessary alterations in my appearance. When I reappeared, half an hour later, shaven, washed, and in evening clothes, I felt a different being, though my curiosity as to the note had in no way abated. My first question on my return to our sitting-room was to ask what Evie had discovered concerning its delivery. There had been little to learn. A district messenger boy had left the missive at the hotel about an hour before our arrival and it had been placed on the table in the usual way.

"It is rather a nuisance," I said, "but I suppose I must at once give information regarding it to the police."

My wife smiled. "You need not worry yourself," she said. "I sent the note to Scotland Yard, with an account of all the information I could gather concerning its delivery, twenty minutes ago by a special messenger."

I was not sorry to hear that there was no necessity for stirring abroad again, and I said so as warmly as I knew how.

"Not that I think the information will be of much use," continued Evie, a little later. "If they could

## 252      The Cruise of the Conqueror

not catch Mannering with the short notice they had last night, there is not much chance of their being more successful to-night, when he has had a much longer time to escape. In any event, I was not going to let you go rushing about all over the place when I can see by your face that you are nearly worn out. I have just ordered supper and sent a message to Edith and Mr. Withington to join us, and directly it is over you are to go straight to bed."

I stoutly combated the view that I was done up, but my own actions belied my assertions. My hot bath had induced a comfortable feeling of languor, and so soon as I had settled comfortably in an armchair I promptly fell asleep.

I was awakened by a crash, which caused me to leap to my feet, under the impression that I was once more aboard the *Mascot*, and that a shell had burst somewhere in my immediate vicinity.

A ludicrous picture was presented to my open eyes. A waiter with wide-stretched mouth, his whole body rigid with terror, stood gazing at me, while the paraphernalia of the supper-table lay scattered on the floor around him, just as it had fallen from his nerveless hands.

I recognized the man as a waiter who had attended upon us for a number of years past on our visits to the hotel, and it was evident that he had recognized me. Evie was looking at him in astonishment, and I for a moment was at a loss to account for his singular behaviour. Then the cause dawned upon me.

"I suppose you omitted to inform Paul that I had come to life again," I said to my wife.

"I certainly had forgotten that the announcement of your death has never been contradicted, and that the story of your reappearance from spirit-land filled columns of all the newspapers in the country," she replied, laughing. Then she turned to the waiter. "You need not be afraid, Paul," she said. "This is no ghostly visitor. It is Mr. Sutgrove himself."

At the sound of my voice the colour had returned to the man's cheeks, and by the time Evie had finished speaking, he had sufficiently recovered his self-possession to stutter out an apology, which my wife promptly cut short by taking all responsibility upon herself for the damage to glass and crockery, the fragments of which he began to retrieve from the floor with trembling hands, while now and again he favoured me with a glance, as if he expected to see me fade away through the wall.

My famous impersonation of a ghost, as Withington described it when he joined us a few minutes later, furnished us with a good deal of amusement, and we were all quite merry about it during the meal. But the recognition had one effect I had not foreseen. Forrest joined us before we had finished our supper, and very shortly after his arrival Paul appeared with a card in his hand, which he gave to me, with the remark, "The gentleman is very pressing, sir. Says it is most important that he should see you at once."

I just glanced at the card and saw inscribed in

## 254 The Cruise of the Conqueror

the corner the magic words, *Daily Mail*. I groaned. The visitor, I realized, was only the advance-guard of an army, and unless I wanted to spend twenty-four hours in being interviewed, flight was the only possible means of procedure. Turning to Withington, I asked him at what time he proposed to start for Southampton.

"By the 10.15 from Waterloo," he answered, promptly.

"Tell the gentleman, Paul," I said, "that Mr. Sutgrove has just gone to bed for the first time for a month, leaving instructions that he is not to be called until four o'clock to-morrow afternoon," and, as he turned to depart, I added, "and you may as well tell all other inquirers the same story without troubling me."

It was lucky I gave the order, for I learned afterwards that the hotel bureau had been besieged by pressmen. Some one had heard of my return and conveyed the news to the newspaper offices with the usual results, and if my would-be interviewers had got a hint as to the contents of Mannering's letters now in my possession, I doubt whether the combined efforts of the hotel staff would have been successful in securing me from intrusion. As it was, however, directly our meal was finished we were able to sit down to an undisturbed council of war; and, in this, we were greatly assisted by some additional scraps of information which Forrest had to give us. In the first place, in corroboration of the fact that Mannering had not yet departed for his

hiding-place, he was able to inform us that the *Conqueror* had, during the afternoon, been sighted on the Essex coast by a pleasure steamer between Clacton and Southend. In view of this fact, the authorities at Scotland Yard had attributed the greatest importance to the letter which had been delivered to me, and most elaborate plans had been made to cut him off if he attempted to rejoin his boat.

I did not think that there was much chance of these being successful. Mannering could have counted upon at least three hours' clear start, and less would be sufficient for a man of his energy and daring. Withington even wished to impress upon Forrest the desirability of doing nothing to interfere with Mannering's rejoining the *Conqueror*. "By not hustling him," he said, "he may be led into a false security on his return to his hiding-place, thus giving us a much better chance of intercepting him on the way."

"That would be all right," replied the detective, "if we really knew where his retreat is."

"There does not seem much reason to doubt that it is in our power to find out," replied the American.

"It cannot be far from the spot where our prisoner told us that the *Mary* first transferred part of her cargo, for it agrees with our former theories formed when we heard of the holding up of the *Dunster Castle*. If you want any further evidence that the spot is in the neighbourhood of Finisterre, it is surely to be found in the Pirate's latest exploit." He held up his finger argumentatively. "If Mannering had a



## 256      The Cruise of the Conqueror

retreat or base of operations within a radius of two or three hundred miles, there would have been no need for him to have held up the *Mosquito*; but necessity impelled him. He would not have held up an oil-ship merely to fill his empty tanks otherwise. In order to get back to his base petrol was a necessity, and his only method of obtaining it to waylay some vessel with a cargo aboard. He must have surmised that we could only have tracked him to the Mediterranean through discovery of his previous purchase of spirit, and he would not have risked capture by attempting to repeat the operation. The mere fact that he found it necessary to hold up an oil-ship in order to replenish his supplies, and, in so doing, advertise his presence in home waters, is, to my mind, almost conclusive evidence that if we look for him in the spot I have indicated we shall not be very far off the scent."

"But what about the two boat-loads of the petrol that he took with him?" said Forrest. "When he was seen this afternoon he had no boats with him, and if he had only desired spirit enough to return to the north of Spain, he would not have needed to do more than fill his tanks."

"As for that," I remarked, "he may be contemplating some further exploits in the North Sea before returning, and there are plenty of creeks on the Essex coast where he could plant the cargo and sink the boats, in the reasonable belief that the stuff would be secure from discovery. The smugglers of an older day knew that full well."

"Good," said Withington. "I hope he has some further adventure in view. Give us twenty-four hours' start, and if we do not drop on him you may call me a self-sufficient ass."

"If we do meet him," I remarked, with a vivid recollection of our last encounter, "I hope it will be in the daylight."

"Day or night will not matter much," said Withington. "My new yacht is provided with the latest thing in sea search-lights, and my agent has already signed on some practised gunners."

"I wish you luck," said Forrest, with a sigh, and he rose to leave us.

"But surely you are not going to desert us," said Withington. "I fully expected to have the pleasure of your company."

"There's nothing I should have liked better," answered the detective, "but I cannot manage it. I shall have to appear at the police court to-morrow to give evidence against our prisoner." He paused before adding, apparently as an afterthought, "If you don't want to be delayed for the same reason I should certainly advise you not to postpone your departure beyond to-morrow morning."

Then our party broke up, for the appeal of a comfortable bed was too insistent to be denied. The night which followed was all too short, for, with Forrest's warning in our minds, we had determined to flit at the earliest possible moment, and eight o'clock saw us all gathered around the breakfast-table. And now

## 258      The Cruise of the Conqueror

for the first time Withington revealed to me the outcome of the long series of telegraphic messages he had despatched from Port Mahon and other stopping-places on our homeward journey.

"*Mascot II.*," he said, "will be quite a match for half a dozen *Conquerors*, as you will easily appreciate when you see her. She is a brand-new turbine despatch boat of five hundred tons, built by Yarrow for the Japanese navy, and in her speed trials has shown herself capable of developing twenty-nine knots. The very thing for us."

"It sounds all right," I remarked, "but how did you manage to get hold of her?"

"The Japs were in no particular hurry for her," he answered, "and as I happen to have had some large financial transactions with the Japanese Government, it was not difficult to get her delivery transferred to me upon an agreement to hand her over in three months' time."

"Plus the payment of a certain consideration," I remarked.

"That goes without saying," he laughed. "But the figure is not an exorbitant one. Anyhow, with her and the *Challenger* we ought to stand a chance of cutting off the Pirate."

"The *Challenger*?" I questioned in surprise. "Are you thinking of taking your motor-boat, too?"

"Yes," he said. "I thought that she might be useful as a patrol boat."

Then a thought occurred to me, to which I instantly

gave words. "Two boats would be better than one for that purpose. Could you not manage to pick up the *Mist*?"

My suggestion commended itself to my friend. Hence it happened that when the rest of the party drove off to Waterloo, I remained behind to depart a few minutes later with Sanders for Paddington *en route* for Salcombe, where the *Mist* was housed.

So far I had had little time to think out the desirability of the course to which I had committed myself, but when I settled down in my seat in the express which was whirling me away to the west country my mind misgave me that I had acted foolishly in allowing my wife's pleadings to induce me to consent to her accompanying us on the cruise. I turned to the newspaper to seek distraction from the accusation of my thoughts, but, as in the old days, the *Motor Pirate* was the one subject which filled them to the exclusion of everything else. There were accounts of his movements in the North Sea; there were full and picturesque details of the capture of the *Eulalie* and of our fight with the *Mary* and the *Conqueror*, evidently obtained from the men of the *Mascot*. I read, too, an interview with the Prince of Monaco, in which his Highness gave an account of his adventures on board the *Conqueror*, and from this I learned that 500,000 francs had been hastily collected from the Monte Carlo banks and the strong room of the Casino in order to secure the Prince's release. There were also details given of projected naval movements, which, if correct, would seem

## 260      The Cruise of the Conqueror

to leave little chance of Mannering's escape. But somehow I did not feel that there was much likelihood of these being successful, and my dejection increased to such a degree that I was half of a mind to stop the express at some station and send a wire to Evie forbidding her to sail in the *Mascot II*. Instead of doing so, however, I fell asleep, and I slumbered peacefully until we ran into Exeter, when I knew that it would be too late to prevent her sailing with the yacht. Moreover, my sleep had refreshed me. I was prepared to take a more optimistic view of matters, and for the rest of the way I chatted cheerfully with Sanders over the prospect before us, and when at last we reached Salcombe and I saw the open estuary shining in the sun my last doubt fled. After all there was a spice of cowardice in perpetual flight, and one could but die once.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### WHICH TELLS HOW THE CONQUEROR OUTMANOEUVRED US

IF any further stimulus had been required to hearten me for the adventure before us, I should have found it for a surety in the attitude of Sanders. The worthy engineer was simply bubbling over with delight at the prospect of once more getting afloat in the *Mist*, and as we traversed the path which led to the boat-house he laughed aloud in pure exaltation of spirits. When I asked him his thoughts, he burst out with a long eulogy of our boat, of which I cannot forbear to give the conclusion.

"Let Mr. Withington and his *Mascots* and his *Challengers* do their best, but in spite of 'em all, it's my confident belief that the *Mist*, and none other than the *Mist*, will be the boat to carry the rope that'll stretch the neck of that black deevil of a pirate."

It was my turn to laugh at the engineer's modern version of the nursery rhyme, but he was by no means abashed thereby, and when I asked him the reason for his confidence my amusement was redoubled.

"Haven't I dreamed it three times running," he said, "I who never dream a dream from Candlemas

## 262      The Cruise of the Conqueror

to Candlemas, so just you mark my words. My dream is bound to come true."

"At all events, if the *Mist* is going to bring off the capture of the Pirate there will have to be nothing the matter with her," I remarked as I turned the key in the lock of the boat-house door.

"There will not be much wrong unless some busy-body has been tampering with her during our absence," he replied as he followed me in.

She had been securely housed, and after a thorough overhauling we were delighted to find that she was as sound as on the day when she had been laid up. We embarked, therefore, with light hearts, and a couple of hours after we had entered the boat-house we were crossing the bar which had given Tennyson inspiration for one of his sweetest poems, and heading straight for the rendezvous off the Start, at which I had arranged to meet Withington.

So well had we gauged the time, that at the very moment we opened the point *Mascot II.* came in view, and at the speed we were both travelling five minutes had not elapsed before we were alongside, and the yacht was hove to, in order to take the *Mist* aboard. The operation was a ticklish one, but the sea was calm, and she was swung on the deck without, so far as we could discover, straining her in the slightest degree. By this time the dusk was gathering fast, and the moment the *Mist* was safely aboard Withington gave the order for full steam ahead, and the stew-

## The Conqueror Outmanoeuvred Us 263

ard appearing to announce that dinner was served, we all made our way below.

We were a particularly merry party in the saloon that night, and we lingered over the meal, for the ladies insisted upon our fighting our previous battles over again, and we for our own part had numberless questions to ask as to what had happened ashore during our previous trip. Afterwards we went on deck for awhile, but we did not linger there. The nights were getting chilly and we turned in early, knowing that possibly, for many more nights to come, we should not be able to allow ourselves the luxury of an undisturbed rest. Nothing occurred to disturb us, and we were all thoroughly refreshed when we turned out next morning. But although we had slept a keen watch had been kept. Nothing suspicious had been sighted, and Withington gave a grunt of satisfaction, and confided to me his belief that a pirate hunt was the finest appetizer he had ever discovered.

A little later the Spanish coast came into sight, and shortly after lunch we put into Ferrol to replenish our bunkers before starting for our cruising ground. This business did not take us long, for Withington had already arranged for his requirements by cable, and before we had let go our anchor lighters were on their way towards us. None of us, not even the ladies, went ashore, and before the afternoon had merged into evening we were once more ploughing the open water of the bay.

It seemed to me that the chance of our managing



## 264      The Cruise of the Conqueror

to run across the *Conqueror* was just about as problematic as the finding of the proverbial needle in a bundle of hay, and when I expressed myself to this effect to Withington he, somewhat to my surprise, agreed with me.

"What is the use of all this preparation, then?" I asked.

"You have left one thing out of your reckoning," he replied. "You have not taken the most important item into account."

"What is that?" I queried.

"Luck, old fellow," he answered. "On this trip we are going to make a definite search of the coast. Of course, I have come to the conclusion that sooner or later Mannering will be coming this way, and I am trusting to my luck to bring me into contact with him."

I shrugged my shoulders. "I haven't much belief in luck being adverse to Mannering," I remarked, but the words were hardly out of my lips before there was a shout from our lookout aft of, "Boat on our starboard quarter, sir. Rising us fast."

"What about luck now?" shouted Withington as he made for the bridge.

"It was hardly luck that made you post a lookout aft as well as at the fore," I answered as I scrambled up after him, anxious to get a sight of the stranger who was still invisible from the deck.

Even from the bridge ten minutes elapsed before I could make out with the glass a tiny speck bobbing

## The Conqueror Outmanoeuvred Us 265

away astern, and it was some minutes more before the speck revealed itself to be a boat with a couple of black dots aboard which might be men. When at last I did secure a good view I dropped my glass with a groan of disappointment.

"That is not the *Conqueror*," I said. "Once seen, the golden decking of Mannering's boat could never be mistaken for that dull-coloured stranger."

"A little paint would soon alter her colour," replied Withington drily. "I shall stick to my view that the fellow is the Motor Pirate himself until you can prove to me that there is another boat in existence capable of running at the speed she is now making. The *Mascot* is under full steam and yet that fellow is sailing three feet to our two."

I took another look at her through my glass, and I could but acknowledge that there was justice in Withington's contention. The boat was steering a course that would have brought her within a couple of cables'-length to starboard when she passed, but even as I watched I noticed that her bow was pointing away.

Withington observed the slight alteration in her course at the same moment that I did. "She dislikes the look of us," he muttered, and he shouted an order to the helmsman. The deviation was slight, but evidently the occupants of the oncoming boat were watching us closely, for the next minute the course of the boat was again shifted a point. Withington followed suit, and so for some minutes the game went on until,

## 266      The Cruise of the Conqueror

from the west by north course we had been steering when the boat had been sighted, the *Mascot* was making due north. The motor-boat had, however, gained upon us no more. She still hung on our quarter at the distance of about half a mile. By this time there was no doubt left in my mind that this was indeed our enemy, an opinion which was indubitably shared by every one on board, and I was anxious to try the effect of a shot upon him. But Withington would not consent.

"It is clear that he mistrusts us, but it is also clear that he does not imagine that we are very dangerous. If he were to put about we should lose sight of him in ten minutes. No, let him continue to waste his petrol by the attempt to get round us, for if we can only edge him far enough off his course there is a chance that he will not have enough spirit left to take him home, and we shall make a prize of him for a certainty."

"True," I answered, "but you have forgotten one thing." I pointed to the west where the sun was rapidly approaching the horizon. "When night comes he will give us the slip for a certainty."

"The light will be good enough for gun practice for half an hour yet," he replied, "and I promise you that in fifteen minutes I will try the effect of a dose of shrapnel."

Slowly the sun went down. The *Conqueror* made no motion to further change her course except once, when Withington made a slight attempt to cut in upon her. Both the yacht and the motor-boat were heading

## The Conqueror Outmanoeuvred Us 267

straight out into the Atlantic. The air was clear, and in the rosy glow reflected from the sky upon the water both boats sped along, silhouetted blackly against the waves of light.

Twelve of the fifteen minutes elapsed and I left the bridge for the deck and made my way aft, where the gun crews stood alert at their posts, and here more than ever I realized the difficulty of getting a shot home upon so slight a mark as that presented by the *Conqueror*. Then once again she edged off to the west, and again the *Mascot* followed suit. To my surprise the motor-boat seemed to be losing way, and the thought flashed into my mind that her supply of petrol was exhausted; but my conclusion was speedily falsified, and at the same moment Mannering's manœuvre was made plain to me. What was comparatively easy to the *Mascot* was child's play to the *Conqueror*. Mannering must have stopped the way on his boat by a sudden reversal of the engines, so rapidly did the *Mascot* forge ahead, and the *Conqueror* dropped at least another cable's-length behind, although Withington had at once passed the order for full speed astern. Then, no sooner was the way off the *Mascot* than the *Conqueror* swung round on the port tack. For two seconds she presented her broadside to us, and then we saw that she was raising a wake which to me was sufficient proof that her motor was running at top speed.

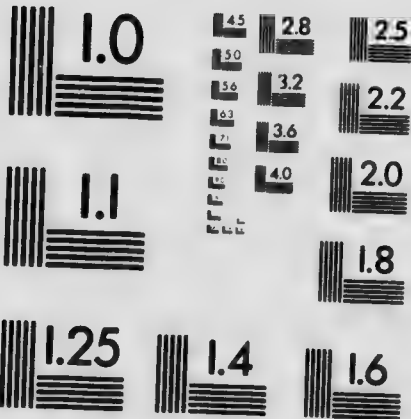
"Damnation!" shouted Withington. "Fire on her. A hundred guineas to the man who makes a hit."

The two guns aft spoke out together uselessly. They



# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



**APPLIED IMAGE Inc**

1653 East Main Street  
Rochester, New York 14609 USA  
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone  
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

## 268      The Cruise of the Conqueror

spoke again and again until their conversation became a continuous mutter. But the *Conqueror* paid no heed, and every moment the mark became smaller. Meanwhile the *Mascot* had put about, and the guns at the fore took up the action as those aft could no longer be brought to bear. Finally, to extinguish our chances of crippling her, the rosy light in the sky faded, and in the cool gray sea the flying *Conqueror* could only be discerned by the smother of foam she made as she plunged her nose into the waves. Soon, seeing that to continue the firing would be a mere waste of ammunition, Withington gave the order to cease fire, and, leaving the ship in charge of the master, he joined me on deck.

I confess that I had expected to see some of the vexation which I was feeling reproduced in his face, but to my surprise nothing of the sort was written there.

"The beggar hasn't lost his legs," he said cheerily as he joined me.

"No," I replied, gloomily. "He most certainly has not, and it seems to me that chasing him is about as insane a proceeding as for a man on foot to try and catch an express train."

"The man on foot might have a chance if there was no water in the locomotive's boiler," he answered, blithely.

"Then you think Mannering must be getting short of petrol?"

"Sure of it," he answered. "If he had plenty he

## The Conqueror Outmanoeuvred Us 269

would have postponed his little manœuvre until after dark. As things turned out he was compelled to take the risk of exposing himself broadside to our fire while the light was good. No, his tanks must be nearly empty or he would never have taken that chance — not that it mattered. That is the result of not having had a naval training. I ought to have foreseen what happened and been prepared for the move. There is only one consolation to be obtained from the incident."

"What is that?" I inquired, for I did not see that any consolation could be derived from the fact that our enemy should have escaped so easily.

"Why, the corroboration it supplies as to the location of his place of retreat," replied my friend. "Otherwise he would never have troubled to manœuvre us out of our course. His object was clearly to get us far enough away from the coast to ensure his being able to run in without detection."

"Then if we had simply kept to the course we were steering when we met him he would have been either compelled to run the gauntlet of our fire or cruise about outside until his supply of petrol was exhausted," I said.

"Exactly," replied Withington. "It was the sudden appreciation of that fact which made me express myself so forcibly a few minutes ago. I hope the ladies will forgive me." He turned to Evie, who, with Edith Withington, had remained on deck, though they had insisted upon the child going below in case of the Pirate returning our fire.



## 270      The Cruise of the Conqueror

"Forgive what?" queried my wife, artlessly.

"Evie has a most convenient deafness upon occasions," chimed in Edith Withington, "and, as it would be unfilial for me to pull your ears, sir, I think on this occasion you will escape being called to account."

We all laughed and the conversation became general. There seemed little prospect of our seeing anything further of the Pirate for some hours at least, and we were thinking of going below to dress for dinner when again the cry of ship ahead galvanized us into life. We were just about crossing the ocean path of all the big southern-bound steamships, so that there was nothing surprising in the hail. Indeed, I had wondered that during our pursuit of the *Conqueror* we had sighted no vessel of any kind. I expected, therefore, to see ahead of us some big Union Castle or P. and O. liner. But in this I was mistaken; instead, I saw bearing down upon us out of the rapidly gathering gloom a low-decked vessel, whose appearance at once stamped her as a torpedo destroyer, and there fluttered to her masthead the signal that she wished to speak with us.

"One of his Majesty's torpedo destroyers, whose commander has heard the firing and wants to know what it was all about," said the master to Withington.

"As we cannot catch Mannering, we may as well do the polite," said my friend, and he bade the master heave the *Mascot* to and ask the stranger to send a boat aboard.

The invitation was not accepted out of hand, but

## The Conqueror Outmanoeuvred Us 271

when Merrick had conveyed to her through the megaphone a certain amount of information regarding our recent experience, her commander no longer hesitated about accepting the invitation. He accepted a further invitation shortly after he had stepped on deck, and, sending back a message by his boat that his vessel was to keep company with the *Mascot*, he expressed himself delighted at having so opportunely arrived at the very moment we were sitting down to dinner.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### WHEREIN WE FIND A LIKELY HARBOUR

THE commander of the destroyer was exceedingly interested in the news we were able to give him, but I fancy he was still more interested in the fact that we had ladies aboard. His point of view can be easily understood. He explained that for the past month he had been cruising on the northwesterly coast of Spain looking for a phantom pirate, while a week of the bay was — on a destroyer at least — sufficient to glut the appetite of the most ardent seaman for the delights of the sea. Naturally he was loath to tear himself away. He was frankly amused at the suggestion that the *Mascot* could succeed where he had failed, though he admitted the possibility of the *Conqueror* being able to elude him had he been engaged alone in the search for her. But a second destroyer and a cruiser had also been told off to engage in the search, and he failed to realize the probability of Mannering escaping from all of them. When, therefore, we told him of our encounter in the Mediterranean, and of the more recent appearance of the *Conqueror* at the mouth of the Thames, he was frankly incredulous in regard to the suggestion that Mannering could have had any permanent base on the Spanish coast.

"The Admiralty seem to think so or they would hardly have kept you here all this time," remarked Withington.

The young commander expressed himself pretty freely concerning his chiefs and their powers of ratiocination, though he wound up by remarking, as he glanced at Edith Withington, that he forgave them for all their ill deeds, since the result had been an acquaintance that he should hope to renew very shortly, as we should be cruising in the same waters. It was about ten o'clock when he returned to his own ship, and as we came on deck to see him off we saw the Finisterre light blinking away at us ahead. He was just going over the side when it suddenly occurred to me that it would be as well to let him know that we had a couple of petrol boats aboard with which we proposed to patrol the coast.

"Lucky you thought of it," he replied when I informed him of our intention. "If our search-light had happened to fall on one of them, I wouldn't have given much for the lives of their crews. You had better rig up some signal astern so that we shall be able to distinguish between your boats and the Pirate — a couple of pennants will do" — and with this piece of advice he took his departure.

A very little later the destroyer parted company with us, for Withington had determined to put about and steam slowly along the coast, while the lieutenant in command of the destroyer had announced his intention of at once communicating the information we

## 274      The Cruise of the Conqueror

had been able to give him to his superior officer on the cruiser.

Nothing further happened that night. Withington and I divided the watches, and morning came without anything to awaken our suspicions. With the dawn the *Mas* once more put about and, hugging the coast closely, we steamed along until we had returned to the spot where as near as we could judge the petrol had been transhipped from the *Mary* by the *Conqueror*. So far as our vicinity from the *Mascot* went, no sort of place which might serve as a harbour of refuge was revealed. The iron-bound coast, rising to tall cliffs, with the sea boiling amongst the broken rocks at the base, seemed to threaten with destruction any floating thing which should have the hardihood to attempt to find a passage amongst them.

"We shall have to make a closer scrutiny of the boats," said Withington, and so immediately after breakfast we launched the *Mist* and the *Challenger* and set out on our quest. A motor-boat, I need hardly say, is not an ideal craft in which to explore a rocky coast, but we argued that if Mannering had his refuge amongst them, where the *Conqueror* could go, there the *Mist* and the *Challenger* could surely follow. Fortunately the weather was fine and the sea calm, otherwise there would have been very little of either of our boats left after a few hours. Close in to the cliffs we found the set of the currents most baffling, and navigation an unceasing strain. More than once when I had entered what appeared to be a navigable channel

running up to some landing-place, the *Mist* would be caught in a race, and it would only be by going full speed astern that she escaped being thrown broadside on to sharp-toothed rocks, which would have bitten through her fragile sides as if they had been paper.

Five hours of this work was quite enough for me, and at the expiration of that time I put about and returned to the *Mascot* without having got a step nearer the solution of the mystery. I approached the yacht at the same time as Withington. We had commenced at the same point and worked in opposite directions. Like myself he had discovered no channel which would have been navigable, and on comparing notes we found that the net result of our morning's work had been to exhaust some four miles of coast.

"At this rate," I remarked when we sat down to lunch, "it will take us a week to explore this bit of the coast, even if the weather holds fine, and heaven only knows how long it will take us if it should chance to be the least bit dirty."

"Added to which," said my friend, "I hardly think it is advisable for us to work far apart. Supposing one of the boats was to touch a rock, we could not get assistance from the *Mascot* in time to be of much service, nor if we should hit off Mannering's hiding-place could we be certain of capturing him single-handed."

It is scarcely to be wondered at that these cautious views commended themselves strongly to both my wife and to Edith Withington, and thus after lunch, at

## 276      The Cruise of the Conqueror

the risk of greatly extending our exploratory operations, the *Mist* and the *Challenger* set off in company. I think the only person who was disgusted at the change of plan was Sanders. He was so cocksure that the time was near at hand when his dream was to come true, that he was actually beginning to feel jealous lest any one else should by chance share in the credit.

He growled out his thoughts to me when Withington's turn came to essay a passage between a couple of likely looking rocks, and there was nothing but satisfaction in his face when she backed out of the channel. So the afternoon progressed as we examined methodically every foot of the coast, but with never anything to flatter us that we were near the attainment of our desires.

We had, in fact, almost decided to give up the quest for the day when Sanders tapped me on the shoulder.

"Well, what is it?" I asked. As the day had worn away without result, he had become so sulky that nothing but grunts could be won from him.

"Ye remember I told you of a dream I had,—a dream I dreamed three times running," he said. The sulkiness was gone from his tone and, turning to look at him, I saw that his face was full of excitement. Without waiting for my answer he continued, "I didna tell ye all of the dream, for I kened that ye were laughin' at me, but a wonderful thing has happened. Look yonder."

Following the direction of his outstretched finger

with my eyes I saw nothing extraordinary. Merely sea and rocks and the foam of the sea breaking on the rocks.

"I can see nothing that tells me anything," I replied.

"D'ye ken those two points like the pinnacles of a church?" he said.

"Yes," I answered, "but what of them?"

"The moment I saw those two bits of rock," he replied, impressively, "that same moment my whole dream came back to me. I saw those two bits of rock in my dream and we steered the *Mist* right between them as we went to capture the *Conqueror*."

I looked at my companion closely. I hardly knew whether to take him seriously. It even occurred to me that the excitement he had undergone since he had been in my service had affected his brain. But he was as sane to all appearance as he had ever been.

At this moment Withington returned from another fruitless attempt to penetrate an apparent passage and shouted to me that he thought we had done enough for the day.

"Ye'll no be returnin' until ye have seen whether there is a passage 'atween those rocks," urged Sanders.

"One moment," I shouted in response. "Sanders has an idea that he can find a way through this infernal tangle of rocks, and I am going to let him have a try."

Even as I spoke I motioned the engineer to take the wheel while I moved aft, glad of the chance to



## 278      The Cruise of the Conqueror

relax my limbs and to smoke a cigarette in comfort. Meanwhile Sanders, nothing loath to take charge, swept out from the coast half a cable's length before once more heading for the land. As we ran out I could see that there certainly looked as if there ought to be a navigable channel at the spot he had indicated. I perceived also the reason why he had made so long a sweep out to the open, for a touch of foam here and there on the water revealed the presence of a long line of rocks barely submerged at the existing state of the tide, which was half-full. As soon as he had opened the point formed by these hidden dangers he brought the *Mist* round, and we seemed to be floating on what was to all appearances a natural passage of deep water guarded on each side by a natural break-water which shelved down into as evil a reef as ever tore the planks from the sides of an honest ship. At the spot where we entered between the two reefs the channel was about one hundred feet wide, and the rocks kept the same distance apart so accurately that they might have been laid down with a line. Slowly we advanced until the rocks lifted themselves from the water on each side of us and a cool draught of air met us as we came into their shadow.

We had entered what was evidently a wide natural cleft in the cliff and I expected to find it a *cul de sac*, for beyond, the cleft appeared to be closed by a blank wall of rock, while as we advanced farther the cliffs towered on each side of us sheer and bare for a couple of hundred feet. Yet as the *Mist* moved slowly on-

wards I began to feel a sense of expectation that we were on the verge of some discovery. Straight as a die was the channel for at least two hundred yards from the spot where the rocks first showed their heads above the water, and then to starboard of us the cliff broke away and the passage widened into a little bay. Bay I have written, but gulf would more fitly describe the place, for all around towered the bare rock without a seam or crevice to break its smoothness, while the light which struck down to the black water was as the faint light of a sunless dawn.

Arrived at this spot, Sanders let the *Mist* come to rest, and a couple of minutes later I was glad to see the *Challenger* emerge from the channel. It was an eerie spot in which to be alone, and I should not have been sorry to have had a boat-load of the *Mascot's* men behind us. Indeed, I had thought of suggesting this course to Withington, but at the moment, Sanders, who had been scanning the walls of the gulf carefully, once more set the *Mist* in motion, and we moved into the thicker blackness of the far side. His keener vision had detected a break in the cliff, and, as we approached it, I, too, recognized that out of this gloomy spot there was another exit at right angles to the passage by which we had entered. It was merely a caverned entrance through the face of the cliff, but the engineer entered it fearlessly. The moment we reached the entrance we saw that the supposed cavern was merely a natural archway, and that beyond was a channel similar to that by which we had entered. I took care to lay my

## 280      The Cruise of the Conqueror

revolver near to my hand, and cast a glance at the Maxim which was mounted aft, for I now began to think that at any moment we might come upon Man-nering.

The channel in which we now found ourselves was not more than thirty feet wide, and it wound about and turned upon itself, while here and there still narrower channels ran out of it, and on more than one occasion we passed the mouths of caves which seemed wide and deep enough to have securely sheltered the *Conqueror*.

We traversed this new channel for another two hundred yards, and then we came to a turning which led into another bay. But this time it was into no sunless gulf that we penetrated. The cliffs had fallen away, giving the light of heaven free access. The sea came in on the one side with a pleasant murmur through numerous small gaps in the rugged fringe of rocks, while on the other a piece of shelving beach ran down to meet the waves which broke softly on the shore, their force broken by the protecting ring of rocks which encircled the tiny bay.

Withington followed us out into this placid piece of water, and his glance, I observed, swept swiftly around it, even as mine had done. He brought the *Challenger* alongside the *Mist*, and remarked: "This looks like the nest, though it would seem as if the bird has flown."

Sanders continued at the wheel. He had not said a word since I had resigned my place to him, but now

he turned to me and remarked: "This canna be the place. There's no pirate here, for I dreamed of no sandy beach, ye ken."

He looked so disappointed that I could not forbear to laugh, and Withington joined in my merriment, for Sanders's dream was no secret to any of us.

"Ye may well laugh," said the Scotsman sourly, "but all the same, ye'll be disappointed that we've come through yon ugly passages all for nothing."

"We will not confess that it is for nothing until we have explored a little bit farther," I replied. "If my eyes do not deceive me, there's a path up the cliff there, and if we can once get on the top we may be able to see something that is not revealed to us below here."

Withington at once jumped at the proposition, and we drew carefully into the land. The American and I sprang ashore, leaving the two engineers to compare notes as to their feelings and keep watch in case Mannering should make an appearance from the unknown caves and passages with which it was obvious the huge mass of cliff into which we had penetrated was honeycombed.

I had not been mistaken as to the existence of a path up the cliff, and we had not gone very far upon it before we had clear evidence that it had been trodden very recently. Footmarks were clearly visible at spots where the soft earth had crumbled down, and, here and there, were scratches on the stone such as would be made by the iron nails in a boot. It was not a very

## 282    The Cruise of the Conqueror

difficult path, so we managed to take the ascent at a pretty brisk pace, though we were fairly winded when we arrived at the summit of the cliff and for the first time looked down upon the sea. It was a magnificent view which met our eyes, but it lacked one thing. Of the *Conqueror* there was no sign whatever.

at a  
when  
first  
icent  
Of

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### WE STRIKE A HOT SCENT

WHILE we paused to regain our breath Withington and I had time to take stock of our surroundings; and here let me describe the nature of the place as it appeared from our vantage-point at the edge of the cliff. First, as to the path which we had ascended. This apparently terminated at the summit, for there was no sign of any track upon the wind-swept uplands, which stretched away for miles inland without sign of house or habitation or even a tree to break the long, even skyline.

"Looks desolate enough to afford our friend security from espionage, doesn't it?" remarked Withington, and we both turned our faces seaward.

In this direction signs of life were not wanting to the view. Right at our feet lay our motor-boats rocking gently on the calm waters of the land-locked bay. Beyond them was a line of rocks against which the sea was breaking, and lying half a mile farther out was the *Mascot*, and with my glass I could make out my wife and Edith Withington on deck scanning the coast for signs of us. Guessing that they might be getting

## 284      The Cruise of the Conqueror

anxious at our long disappearance, I took my handkerchief from my pocket, and let it flutter in the breeze, and in a couple of minutes I saw that my signal had been recognized by an answering flutter of cambric. Then we turned our attention to the mass of cliff on our right through which we had managed to win our way to the tiny beach. This being rather higher than the spot upon which we stood, veiled from us a view of the sea beyond, and hid entirely the channel by which we had gained entrance to the landing-place. Looking at my watch and finding that sunset was not due for nearly two hours, I proposed to Withington that we should make an attempt to reach this higher pinnacle. He was nothing loath to do as I proposed, and we set out upon the edge of the cliff in the desired direction. The task was not an easy one, but neither did it present any particular difficulties to men with cool heads and sure feet, and in a quarter of an hour we had scrambled on to a crag from which we could take a bird's-eye view of the near portion of the coast hitherto shut out from our sight. I do not think that ever in my life have I seen a more chaotic piece of cliff scenery than met our gaze. Masses of bare rocks were piled up at all sorts of angles beneath us, while the whole mass was riven with chasms, in one place narrow enough to step across and in others opening out into enormous mouths which exaggerated the mutter of the rising tide into a continuous roar.

"I wonder what this place would be like in a storm," I said to Withington.

"I cannot imagine," he answered, soberly. "Even now one could fancy that any one of these gaps communicated with the bottomless pit, and that we could hear the cries of souls in anguish arising from them. But let us get on."

He took the lead, picking a path — if path it could be called — where man's foot had probably never trodden before, across the tangled mass towards the sea-face. Our progress was slow, which was not surprising considering the nature of the way. The climb by which we had reached the crag that formed our starting-place was child's play to what we were now called upon to perform. Yet we did not think of turning back, though our hands were cut and bleeding and our elbows and knees scored by the sharp points of rocks over which we clambered towards our goal. About half-way towards the sea we came to an impassable chasm of a width which it was impossible for us to bridge, and we had little doubt but that it was the channel by which we had entered the bay from the cliff-bound pool. There was nothing to be done if we wished to explore farther but to follow the cliff edge and so ultimately make our way round the pool. We progressed successfully for some distance on our new track until, in fact, we came to the verge of the pool itself and looked down into its depths. But a few yards farther we found our way barred absolutely, for on clambering over a smooth ridge of rock, worn by the weather to an edge as keen as a knife, we found ourselves on a little plateau of a couple of yards square



## 286      The Cruise of the Conqueror

with a sheer drop of thirty feet before us. On our left was the gulf through which we had passed, and on the right was another huge break in the cliff fashioned very similarly. We had reached, in fact, what appeared to be a natural wall of rock separating two of these gulfs, and had it not been for the fault it seemed that we should have been able to pass between them to the sea-face of the cliff.

"'Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther,'" quoted Withington.

"Obviously," I replied, "and more's the pity, for I should like to have ascertained whether there is any entrance to this place," and I indicated the gulf on our right hand.

"We will come again with a stronger party and some ropes," said my friend, "and overhaul the place thoroughly. Meanwhile, if you will grip hold of my ankles I will make an attempt to see into this hole."

He lay down on the rock and I held on to his legs while he lowered himself cautiously down its slanting surface until his head and shoulders were extended beyond the verge.

"Don't waste too much time in your scrutiny," I remarked, "unless you want me to loose my hold."

"It would be a short way of discovering what is at the bottom," he replied, as he gazed earnestly into the depths.

He did not try my strength too much, however, for in about fifty seconds he bade me haul away, and I

dragged him back on to the plateau with damaging results to his clothing.

"See anything?" I asked, eagerly, for there was that in his face which made me suspect that his temerity had not been unrewarded.

"Something that I cannot quite make out," he answered. "Can you trust to me and take a peep for yourself?"

For reply I laid myself on the ground and cautiously worked myself downwards until my head was clear of the edge of the cliff. It was an eerie sensation. The rock seemed horribly smooth, and, though I was gripping it with fingers and elbows, knees and toes, while Withington held me by the ankles with a grip of steel, yet every moment I felt as if I should slide off into the blackness beneath. A mist was over my eyes for a second or two, but it cleared, and I gazed into the gulf beneath. The opposite side, 150 feet away, was one sheer unbroken cliff-face, and there was nothing between the summit and the water to attract attention; but beneath me the formation was different. The rock curved away inwards in a cave formation, so that the line where the rock met the water was lost in the gloom. Yet, staring intently into this darkness, it appeared to me that there was something lying near the edge of the cliff which might be a huge boulder or it might be a boat. But strain my eyes as I might I could not ascertain definitely, and I was about to bid Withington haul me up, when a sound so unearthly rose from the depths that only by a strong

## 288      The Cruise of the Conqueror

effort could I succeed in preventing myself shrieking aloud in sheer fright. From all sides there burst on my ears peal upon peal of strange laughter, so unnatural in tone, so strangely distorted and jumbled, that it seemed like the laughter of fiends.

It rose and it fell, it nearly died away and was again repeated until I thought it would never end, and all the time I hung headlong over the gulf in an agony of apprehension lest Withington should loosen his grip and I go plunging head first into that horrible gulf, probably to awaken that same laughter again. But it stopped at last, and in a shaky voice I called to Withington to haul me up.

"I thought you were never going to give the word; in another ten seconds I should have pulled you back without waiting to be asked," he said. "I was afraid you would wrench my wrists out of their sockets, for you hung like a dead weight on my hands for most of the time. What did you make out below?"

His tone was so cool that I looked at him in astonishment.

"What did I see?" I said. "Did you hear that horrible ——"

I paused, for his face betokened nothing but satisfaction.

"Heard?" he replied. "Of course I heard." Then he looked at me intently. "I suppose you have never been into a big cave and listened to the strange pranks the hollows and the rocks will play with the human voice?"

"The human voice," I queried. "Nothing human was responsible for all that horrible uproar."

"My dear fellow, you may take my word for it that what has so impressed you is nothing more than natural human laughter. It is absolutely and incontrovertible proof that in that pool below are men like unto ourselves. And," he continued, gravely, "if you will put on your considering cap and reflect who those fellow creatures are likely to be, you will come to the conclusion that the scent we have struck is a hot one."

Withington's words and still more his manner brought back my equilibrium. "Maybe you are right," I replied. "But all the same I do not see how we are to get into that inner fastness of theirs."

"Where one man goes, there another may surely follow," he declared, sententiously. "But there will be time enough for that to-morrow. If we want to find our way out through these rocks to-day we shall have to think about returning."

He was right. The sun was dropping rapidly and we had a stiff climb before us. Without more discussion we turned our faces to the path by which we had reached our vantage-point and retraced our steps as speedily as we could. Even then the light was failing as we at last slid down the way which led to the beach, where the engineers of the two boats were anxiously watching for our arrival. We embarked at once and, the *Challenger* leading, we plunged into the gloom of the channel between the rocks. The passage had been awe-inspiring enough in the full light of day,

## 290      The Cruise of the Conqueror

but in the evening light it was as cold and sombre as an antechamber to hell, while the pool in which we presently found ourselves might have been filled with the veritable water of death. We did not linger therein, and we all drew long breaths of relief when we finally emerged from the shadow of the rocks and felt the sea breeze fresh on our faces. We raced the boats home to the *Mascot* and stepped aboard with the comfortable feeling that the day when we should be able to ask a reckoning at Mannering's hands for all the evil he had wrought was fast approaching. There was only one thing that was imperative. Whatever happened, Mannering must not be allowed to escape, and heedless even of the demands of appetite, no sooner were we on the deck of the *Mascot* than we began to discuss this matter. We did not take long to arrive at a conclusion as to the means to be adopted. All that was requisite was to bottle the neck of the channel until the morning, when we might renew our search. But how best to perform this task was not so obvious. During the day the weather had changed, a breeze was beginning to blow from the northwest, accompanied by a misty rain, and it would be the merest folly to endanger the safety of the *Mascot* and the precious lives aboard her by hugging the coast closely enough to keep the entrance of the channel continuously under observation. When we had quite decided that this course was impossible, I looked at Withington and Withington looked at me. One thought had occurred to each of us.

"It means a night patrol," said Withington.

I nodded. "A good dinner is the best preparation," I remarked, and without any further parley we went below.

We did not talk much over the meal, though we gave the ladies an account of our discoveries, and after plentifully dosing ourselves with strong black coffee, we once more donned our oilskins, and reëmbarked on our motor-boats, taking with each of us this time an extra hand, making sure that the guns and life-belts were in good order, and seeing that the petrol tanks were full.

Then began one of the dreariest night-watches I have ever kept. I never want to pass through a similar experience. The *Mist* slid out into the darkness, and straightway it seemed that we had lost hold of existence. When I came to compare notes afterwards with Withington, I found that he had experienced the same sense of unutterable loneliness. The night was so thick that at first even my companions in the boat were invisible, though after awhile, when my eyes had grown accustomed to the night, I could manage to just distinguish them and to make out the crest of the waves as they rushed down upon us. Later when we neared the rocks the break of the foam showed like a white sheet stretched against the blackness of the night. The *Challenger* had passed out of sight the moment we had left the side of the *Mascot* and for an hour we did not catch sight of her. I had steered the *Mist* to the spot agreed upon, and Withington had,

## 292    The Cruise of the Conqueror

I doubted not, also taken up his appointed station. We had arranged to signal each other at the expiration of every hour, and when the first period had passed and I saw a flash of light from a hand-lamp held aloft, I began to feel a renewal of confidence. I made a reply with the lamp which we kept so carefully shaded that only the merest gleam fell on our compass, and thereafter I began to feel more comfortable.

Still the passage of the hours was slow. There was nothing but the suck of the pumps and the trembling of the screw to fill the blank. What my companions were thinking about I did not know, for beyond an occasional objurgation at the weather, neither of them said a word.

Five times we had signalled and the time was approaching for the sixth, when a flash of light from the direction in which Withington had last made his presence known attracted my attention.

One, two, three flashes I counted, and my heart began to beat faster, for this was the signal which announced that my friend had seen something which had aroused his suspicions. Then almost at the same moment I heard the quick report of a gun, and setting our engine at full speed I headed the *Mist* in the direction of the vanished gleams. For five minutes I kept on my course, then I slackened speed, fearful lest I should come upon the *Challenger* in the darkness and involve both boats in a common ruin.

I need not have feared. The next moment a blue light flared out half a mile ahead of me, and as the

*Mist* rose to the crest of a wave I gained a sight of our enemy. I saw, too, that our attempt to bottle the mouth of the channel had been an ignominious failure. I had been thinking that I had never been more than a cable's-length from the entrance, whereas I now perceived that I had not made sufficient allowance for the drift of the tide, and was at least a couple of miles down the coast. While wondering at this I thought it remarkable that Withington should have sighted the *Conqueror* at all. The light burned down, but another flared up, and then I saw the reason. The light was an answer to some signal from the *Mascot* which had escaped my notice. The *Conqueror* was running straight for the yacht, and as I realized the meaning of Mannering's action my brain whirled. Once more I set the *Mist* going to her fullest capacity and steered straight for the spot. But I need not have feared. There were sharp eyes and capable hands aboard the yacht. Of a sudden a beam of light flashed from her tops, and where it fell an arc of blinding light encircled the pirate boat.

Mannering must have realized the danger that threatened him, for immediately the light enveloped him his boat whirled about and ran for the shore.

I felt calm on the instant and then the joy of battle surged up in me. "Steady," I said, turning to Sanders. "I fancy we shall just manage to cut him off before he gets into his refuge." And with a turn of the wheel I swept our boat round on her new course.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

### FOUND AND LOST

I HAD thought the race for the Cross-Channel cup when first I had met the *Conqueror* had been exciting enough, but it was nothing to the race which now ensued. Mannering had realized his danger the moment Withington's blue light had been answered by the search-light from the *Mascot*. Then the *Mascot's* guns began to speak, and beyond and behind him I saw the water spout under the bursting shells. But his luck held true, none of them touched him. For my own part I did not attempt to try the effect of our Maxim, for, as both boats were travelling at top speed in a choppy sea, there would have been about as much chance of bringing down the moon as of getting a bullet home on the hull of the *Conqueror*.

On this occasion the race only lasted a few minutes, but the excitement of a lifetime was packed into it. As we plunged through the waves the spray stung our faces like whips. Sometimes it would seem as if the boat was anxious to quit the water altogether as we leapt from crest to crest of the waves. Sanders was busy with the motor and I, well — I was running the

brave little boat a fraction above safety point, and he knowing what I was doing was keeping his eyes glued to the engine to watch for the first appearance of any weakness.

Gradually the *Mist* drew nearer the circle of light which surrounded the *Conqueror*. The *Challenger* was no longer burning a light, but I guessed that she, too, was not far off, for I had marked the direction in which she was being steered.

Fearful lest we should collide with her, I bade our extra hand burn off a light. It was lucky he did so. In answer Withington also responded with a similar flare and I saw him about fifty yards to starboard, steering a course which in another ten seconds would have brought his boat athwart our course if nothing had been in the way. But the illumination revealed a more imminent danger than collision. Both boats were heading directly for the outlying reef of rocks which guarded the entrance to the channel we had explored in the afternoon, and had it not been for that timely light nothing could have saved us from destruction. So near were we that though I turned the *Mist* within her own length, the foam from the breakers was blown all over us, and the *Challenger* was hidden for a moment in a whirl of flying spindrift. Meanwhile the *Conqueror*, which we had thought to intercept, had found the mouth of the channel and passed us on the other side of the sheltering reef. It was only a matter of seconds. "Will you come?" I shouted to Sanders.

"Have after the deevil," he yelled in reply, and

## 296      The Cruise of the Conqueror

in the glare of the light I saw that his face was distorted with rage. "After him quick an' he canna escape."

The *Mascot* had followed, and the flashlight showed us the way as we rounded the point of the reef, and I headed the *Mist* for the break in the cliff. We went in on the crest of a huge wave at terrific speed, and the moment I felt, rather than saw, the walls of rock spring up beside us I cut out the engine, and with a firm grip on the wheel locked up for any indication that we should have reached the pool. But the dense blackness gave no sign, though I guessed that the haven was attained by the sudden subsidence of the water which, penned in the narrow passage, spread suddenly as it found room to expand again. I shouted to Sanders to burn another light. But the roar of the waves as they entered the passage made any mere human voice of none effect. The darkness, too, was so intense that I could not even explain my desires by a gesture. The *Mist* floated uneasily on the boiling pool, and I feared every moment that we should be hurled against the rocks. Even as I anticipated the danger it came upon us. I felt a thrill strike through the boat, and though I could hear nothing, yet I knew that the boat was dragging broadside on to the wall of cliff, and holding out my hand I pushed against the solid rock. The next instant, anticipating my desire, a match sputtered aft, the blue fire burst into flame, and I whipped out my revolver in the expectation of finding my enemy within a few yards. The flare il-

luminated the gorge more brightly than day had done. It revealed every nook and corner in the place, but of the *Conqueror* there was no sign. Entering, even as the *Mist* had done, came the *Challenger* on the crest of a wave, and I could see disappointment marked on Withington's features, as he, too, realized that the wild beast's lair was empty. He steered his boat beside the *Mist*, and putting his mouth close to my ear, bawled, "He must have gone under."

I shook my head. "We must leave him until tomorrow," I replied. "It is too risky with this sea on to explore further to-night."

Meanwhile Sanders had lifted himself from beneath the hood and was gazing about him. "Whaur's he gone?" he asked.

I shrugged my shoulders, and for reply pointed to the sky and then to the sea. The engineer's face wore a puzzled air, and bending over the side he looked into the black water as if that could supply a solution to the mystery of the Pirate's disappearance. Then a smile appeared on his face, and he shouted in my ear, "I'll just be gangin' after him. Come for me in the morn."

I doubted whether I could have heard him rightly. "What?" I cried.

He answered me with an enigmatic smile, and before I could take a step to prevent him he plunged overboard.

At the very moment the waters closed over his head the light flickered out. "Quick! Another light," I

## 298      The Cruise of the Conqueror

roared at the top of my voice. The order reached the man seated in the stern-sheets in spite of the hubbub, and he did his best to obey. Barely half a minute could have elapsed before another light was fired, but short as was the time, it was sufficient for all traces of the engineer to have been lost. I looked eagerly round, expecting to see him come to the surface, but there was no sign of him upon the smooth black swell which rose and fell, licking the granite walls of the pool hungrily. Withington must have observed Sanders's strange action, for he, too, burnt a light, and I could see him and his two companions closely scanning the surface of the waves.

Those lights burned out. We lit others, and so again and again until hope finally left me, and by gesture I intimated to Withington my intention of returning to the open sea.

I had no doubt in my own mind as to what had happened. The engineer's brain had evidently given way under the strain of the chase, and in a moment of madness he had made his fatal plunge. I began to feel the strain myself, and I knew that should I remain in the intense darkness of that rock-bound pool, I might have some difficulty in restraining myself from following Sanders's example. So I steered for the open sea.

Fortunately I was not compelled to trust to instinct to find the channel. Upon clearing the angle within which we had been sheltered, the brilliant beam from the search-light of the *Mascot* lay directly ahead.

ing the passage perfectly. The yacht had followed us in to the coast, and now rode head on to the breeze not a quarter of a mile from the shore. It was not long, therefore, before I had taken the *Mist* alongside, though a much longer period elapsed before the two motor-boats were swung on to the davits and got aboard. By this time the dawn was just throwing a faint gleam of gray on the face of the sea, and the wind dropping and the waves moderating, Withington gave orders to the master not to run out of range of the channel mouth, while I tumbled below to my berth feeling utterly fagged out.

Perhaps I ought to have mentioned that our first greeting on reaching the *Mascot* had been from my wife and Edith. I learned afterwards that they had remained on deck the whole of the night, but, beyond one inquiry as to the reason for Sanders's disappearance, they forbore to ask us any questions. Instead of pestering us for details of what had happened they hastened to provide us with glasses of steaming hot grog, which brought back the warmth to our chilled frames and acted as the last inducement to slumber. But our sleep was not destined to run a natural course.

My head seemed hardly to have touched the pillow before I was awakened, and I muttered crossly that I did not desire to be disturbed. The intruder persisted, and the sleep leaving my eyes, I found that Withington had me by the shoulder and was shaking me vigorously.

### 300      The Cruise of the Conqueror

"Come," he was saying, "four hours' spell is sufficient for anybody, and there is work to be done to-day."

I jumped out of my berth on the instant, and the events of the preceding night came back to me. "Tell me," I asked, "did we really chase the *Conqueror* last night or have I dreamed it?"

"It was no dream," he replied. "I wish it had been, for then we should not have lost that engineer of yours. What happened to him? Did he go mad or what?"

I explained exactly what he had said, and gave Withington my own impressions on the subject while I dressed. Nothing but madness, we concluded, could explain his action.

"But I did not come here to discuss poor Sanders," remarked Withington after exhausting the subject. "I came to inform you that we have visitors aboard."

"Who the deuce ——" I began.

He did not allow me to conclude my query.

"Who else should it be but our young friend of the destroyer who dined with us the other night. We made him so welcome, apparently, that he has brought some others with him, for Merrick tells me that a second destroyer has just put in an appearance, and that there is a ship he makes out to be a cruiser in the offing."

"That means that we shall have a large enough party to make an exhaustive search of this stretch of coast," I said.

Withington actually sighed. "I am afraid that it is our duty to tell them all we know," he remarked.

"Duty be hanged," I said. "It is common sense."

"I had so hoped to have brought off the capture on our own account," he replied sadly, "but my conscience has prevailed over my inclination. So, if you want to be in at the death, you will not have to take too long over your breakfast."

He left me to myself at this, and I need hardly say that I had finished my toilet and was in the saloon a very few seconds later.

I need not have hurried. I found our acquaintance of the destroyer seated very comfortably at the table obviously enjoying both his breakfast and the society of Edith Withington. He had asked to be informed when the other vessels sighted had arrived within speaking distance, the which he declared would be quite time enough for him to think of returning to his own boat. "You see," he was explaining to the American girl, "when once that old beast of a cruiser comes on the scene I shall not have a look in. I know old Moore — her commander, don't you know — and he will take precious good care to have the *Mascot* under his own protection so long as she is cruising in these waters."

"But the *Mascot* is very well able to take care of herself," answered the girl.

"I am sure of that," he replied, "but Moore will easily find an excuse for thinking otherwise."

"What excuse can he find?" she asked with a prettily assumed air of innocence.



## 302      The Cruise of the Conqueror

"As if you need to ask me that," he retorted with an unmistakable look of admiration in his frank, blue eyes. His attitude was too much for the girl's sense of humour, and she laughed outright while her companion swallowed a sigh and a big draught of coffee simultaneously as I came forward and took my seat at the table. However, he at once commenced an attack upon a cold tongue, which showed that his naval training had at least taught him the advantage of making the most of all opportunities. I can guess that he was not too delighted at my appearance, but when Withington joined us and we narrated to our visitor the story of what had occurred during the past twenty-four hours, he became as anxious to make an search of the coast as we were ourselves. So keen was he that he did not waste any further time when once our story was finished, but returned immediately to his vessel in order to take the news to his superior officer, though he did not cease to bewail the cruiser's arrival, which now was an additional calamity, since it would prevent him making an attempt at Mannering's capture on his own account. On his departure Withington gave orders for the long-boat to be lowered, for in the exploration we proposed to undertake, the motor-boats would have been a useless encumbrance, and if the *Conqueror* should by any chance reach the open sea the guns of the four vessels now closing in on the mouth of the channel would of a certainty be able to give him the *coup de grâce*.

Our young friend was not long in giving the information to his commanding officer, for by the time our boat had arrived off the mouth of the channel we saw the cruiser's boats being lowered away. We waited until they were near enough to steer their course by our own boat, and then entering we awaited their arrival in the now familiar pool. The weather had moderated and the sun was shining brightly, but it produced little effect in the gloomy spot where poor Sanders had put an end to his existence. Our crew were so affected by the atmosphere of the place that they sat silent at their thwarts, though, as a rule, they were as merry a set of men as ever pulled oars. The boats from the British ships soon followed us, and when all five of them gathered within the walls of the cliffs we started upon a methodical examination of every passage and cranny which could give harbourage to a dinghy even.

There is no need to detail the experiences of that day. We searched every channel and cavern in the riven mass of rock in the hope and expectation that we should happen upon one by which the *Conqueror* had reached her still undiscovered lair. But we searched in vain. Part of the boats' crews under Withington's guidance were landed and made persevering attempts to find the clue to his hiding-place from the summit of the cliff, with no better result. When evening came it was a very disappointed party which met at the inner bay.

Both Withington and I were completely non-

## 304      The Cruise of the Conqueror

plussed by our failure. It almost seemed to us as if on the preceding night we had been the sport of some phantom boat. As for the crews of the British boats, I could see from their expressions that they imagined that we had been telling them a yarn evolved from our own imaginations. Yet in this hour of our deepest disappointment we were close on a solution of the mystery, though the solution was to come in a manner and through a medium that was to leave our wildest imaginings far behind.

As the *Mascot's* boat had led the way into the labyrinth, so she led the way out. We passed through the channel which connected the bay with the inner pool, upon arriving at which we waited for the other boats to join us. The last of them had just emerged from the arch of rock, and Withington had bidden his men give way when the unexpected happened. Only a faint light filtered down to the surface of the water, just enough to enable us to make out the walls of the cliff hemming in the pool, and I was looking at the apparently impenetrable wall when I saw what appeared to me to be the cliff opening. Thinking I was suffering from some optical delusion, I rubbed my eyes. But the opening was growing wider, as if a curtain was being rolled up from the surface of the water. Fearing lest I was going mad I shouted aloud. What I said I do not know, but my cry and my outstretched arm turned every eye towards the cliff. Then something long and dim and gray as the light in which it

moved crept out of the open face of the cliff, and gathering way shot across the pool to the sea entrance.

"The *Conqueror*," I cried, and my words were taken up and repeated as the oars of our men struck the water savagely.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE CAPTURE OF THE CONQUEROR

As well might we have attempted to chase a phantom ship as to pursue the *Conqueror* with mere oars. But we did not think of that as we dashed down the channel to the sea.

"We have him now to a surety," said Withington. "Between us and the ships he cannot escape."

And directly we reached a position from which we could obtain a view of the open water and the flying Pirate, it seemed as if the latter had realized the hopelessness of flight. The *Conqueror* was steering straight for the *Mascot*, which lay a little to the east of the channel mouth, while her commander was standing erect and waving what appeared to be a white flag.

"He surrenders, he surrenders," shouted Withington, ecstatically.

For my own part I feared that Mannering was bent on some devilish scheme which would involve the *Mascot* and all aboard in the fate which awaited himself, and as the *Conqueror* drew near her I could scarcely bear to look upon the yacht. But the motor-

boat approached the yacht, lay alongside as if parleying, then a figure left her and scrambled up the side, while the boat secured by a rope swung away astern.

"I really believe he has surrendered," I said. "I should never have expected Mannering to give up the fight so tamely."

"He knows when he has lost the game, I suppose," replied Withington, and we fell to silence as we pulled away for the yacht. The moment we swept alongside I was up the side with a rapidity which brought a gust of laughter from Withington. Yet on reaching the deck I stood stock-still. Instead of seeing my old enemy awaiting me I was greeted by Sanders. Again that day I began to think that my senses had deserted me. Withington, who had followed me over the side, was as much taken aback as I was. We had not a word between us. But Sanders was not stricken with dumbness.

"I'm for thinkin' that ye may be takin' me for yon Pirate Mannering," he remarked, while his infrequent smile screwed up his mouth and eyes. "But I thought that to bring away with me both the head Pirate and his asseestant, as well as his boat, would be a trifle beyond my ability, so I didna' try."

"Sanders!" I gasped, "is it really yourself in the flesh? We thought you were drowned."

"I'm no mad enough to commit suicide yet," he answered. "Though I can understand your thinkin' such was the case when I bobbed out of sight in yon dreary pool. But hadna' ye better go back and make

## 308      The Cruise of the Conqueror

sure of capturing the man Mannering? If ye leave him too long he might discover some chance of escaping forbye."

"Then you have seen him? Where is he?" I asked.

"When I left him the noo," he answered, "he was cursin' with a freedom which would turn Owd Nick himself white with envy, for he was comin' down to his boat just as I was movin' off through the open door, and havin' forgotten his gun he just realized that he would not be able to return for it in time to stop me."

I let loose a flood of questions, but they were not answered then, for Withington said, abruptly: "We must return at once. Mannering may have a spare boat, and we must allow him no chance of escape." Briefly we explained the position of affairs to the lieutenant in command of the cruiser's men, and once more tumbling into our boat, we steered for the hiding-place where Mannering had baffled us for so long. At the last moment Sanders slipped into the boat. I was glad that he seated himself beside me, for I was greedy to hear the account of what had befallen him since he had so mysteriously vanished from sight beneath the waters of the pool. He did not waste any time before satisfying my curiosity.

"It was like this, ye ken," he said. "I was watching the water, and I couldna' help noticing that there was a set in it as if the tide was running on through the rocks, and I thought that if I jumped in I should

## The Capture of the Conqueror 309

very soon find out. So in I went, and I was hardly under before I was sorry that any such idea had come into my head, for the tide was running under the surface at a pace I hadna' dreamed of, and it caught me by the legs and dragged me down, and held me until I thought my breath would give out. But at last I felt my head bob out of the water. I hadna' breath enough left to cry out for help, which was lucky as it turned out, for if I had I should for certain not be here this minute. I was keeping myself afloat, wondering whereabouts the *Mist* might be, and hoping that you would show a light of some kind, when I saw a sort of a glow ahead. Then it occurred to me that the air was quiet, and cocking my ears out of the water I knew that I could not be in the same pool into which I had plunged from the *Mist*. I concluded at once that the tide had dragged me through some passage into another pool, and that I might be drifting straight into the place we had been searching for. The thought made me cautious about singing out for assistance. So after I had got back my breath and wiped the water out of my eyes I took a couple of strokes ahead, which brought me abreast of a big lump of rock, and I came plump into the light of as cheerful a looking fire as ever I saw in my life, and ye ken I am always fond of a good fire. But I didna' think it was wise to stop in the light of the blaze for long, since on one side of it stood the Pirate himself, and on the other side was that same ugly-faced German whom I first saw at Calais. Well,



## 310      The Cruise of the Conqueror

having seen that much, I thought the next thing to do was to return an' tell ye all about it, an' so I turned and swam back into the darkness and made an attempt to dive under whatever the obstacle was which shut off the two pools from one another. But it was no manner of use trying. The tide was running in like a mill-race, an' so I made the best of a bad job, and felt my way along until I came to a spot where I found a hold for my hands and clambered up out of the water. I was fancying that I should be just able to find a resting-place until the tide turned, but instead of that I found that I had hit upon a smooth path about three feet above the water level. I easily guessed that it could only lead in the direction of the place where our friends were warming themselves, so I just sat down where I was and waited for some light on the subject. It was weary work, I can tell ye, Mr. Sutgrove, especially as I darena' close my eyes lest one or other of the villains should come along. But the dawn came at last, an' as soon as I could see to pick my way I followed up the path until I came in sight of the fire. There was no chance of getting near it, unfortunately, for an arm of the pool lay between the place where I stood and the spot where Mannering was toasting his toes, and there was no way round. But it gladdened my heart to see the *Conqueror* lying opposite me against a wooden landing-stage. By this time there was so much light that I feared lest I should be seen, and I thought I would go back and ascer-

## The Capture of the Conqueror 311

tain if I could find the way in. I did. It was a very simple contrivance after all — just a big sliding door, weighted so nicely that it was as easy to lift as a window sash, and with a little hand wheel and pulley arrangement to pull it up and down.”

“A door?” I asked in astonishment. “I could have sworn that those cliffs were solid rock.”

“And I’ll no be saying as ye are not right except as to that one place. But I’m not wondering that none of us spotted the sham in the dim light of the pool, for the outer face of the door was faced with slabs of rock, and unless ye knew the exact spot to look, ye would never find out the trick of it.”

He paused for an instant in his narration, and I put the question, “Why did you not attempt to escape by swimming? There were five boats inside the outer pool the greater part of the day, and you would have been picked up at once.”

“Well, it was like this,” replied Sanders. “As I could not see through the door, I could not be certain that I should find you on the other side. Besides, it occurred to me that I might make quite certain that those ruffians could not escape if I could manage to get hold of the *Conqueror* and bring her away with me. So I waited and watched in the hope that I should find a chance of getting on board her unseen. I thought they would be needing sleep the same as ordinary men, but it seems they did not, for every time I crept up to a point at which I could see them, one or the other was on the watch. And so the day

## 312      The Cruise of the Conqueror

passed, and I was getting desperate, for ye ken I had had nothing to eat the whole day. So I just went and had a last look as the dusk was coming on and I found that there was no sign of either of them to be seen. They must have gone into the cave in front of which their fire had been built. But I did not wait to find what had become of them. I just swam across to the *Conqueror*, and, cutting her adrift, I towed her to the entrance before starting her engines. I had to get a light for that to see what I was doing, but there were matches and a lamp aboard, so that I found no difficulty in doing so. I suppose I must have betrayed myself to the pirates, for as I was on the bank lifting the door I heard them shout out, and I knew that they had discovered that the *Conqueror* had disappeared. I didn't hang about then, as you may guess, but I jumped aboard as soon as the shutter was high enough to let the boat pass under, and setting her going as fast as I could, I steered for the open."

Sanders had just reached the conclusion of the narrative of his adventures as we once more approached the pool, and I had no time to express to the engineer my appreciation of the pluck and endurance which had brought us so near to the goal at which we aimed. Though there was still twilight outside, the darkness of night had already settled on the rock-encircled waters of the pool into which the boats cautiously steered. Yet even as we entered, the darkness was broken by a ruddy glow issuing from the mouth of

## The Capture of the Conqueror 313

the cavern through which Sanders had made his escape.

"Hullo!" said Withington. "Mannering has left his front door open and a light burning to guide us to his lair."

"It would be more like him to have arranged for a light by which to shoot us down as we enter," I replied.

"We will chance that," said the American, as he bade the men give way.

The same disregard of danger evidently animated the crews of the other boats, two of which reached the entrance to the inner pool before us, and made no pause before entering. We followed hard at their heels, and a dozen strokes brought us in sight of one of the grandest spectacles upon which I have ever gazed. From the mouth of a cavern on the left of us there roared up a huge body of flame licking the side of the cliff for a hundred feet at least. The heat was so great that I was compelled to shelter my face with my hands to prevent my skin being blistered.

"By Jove!" said Withington. "He must have fired his store of petrol. The sooner we are out of this the better."

The deed followed the word, and none too soon. The flaming spirit was already pouring over the brink of the rock, and as the boats raced back to the entrance, the fire followed after, spreading on the face of the water as rapidly as the boats could move. Fortunately the passage formed a natural draught, so

## 314      The Cruise of the Conqueror

that the flames were forced inwards instead of outwards, or the boats would never have reached safety. I thought that we might even be compelled to retreat to the open sea, but such was not the case. The fire burned itself out with extraordinary rapidity. One moment the whole of the inner pool was a lake of liquid fire, the next it was black as the grave, heavy with the odour of burning petrol, the surface of the water moving sluggishly under a sheeting of thick oily scum.

Then we entered again. We had no fear of anyone disputing our entrance, for nothing human could have withstood the fiery blast which we had witnessed.

"He has escaped," cried Withington. There was a note of infinite regret in his voice.

"He must have had wings like a bird or fins like a fish, then," replied Sanders, "and as I did not see that he was gifted with either I'm no thinking that I would not rather be hanged than escape in that same fashion."

Is there anything more to tell? I think not. It goes without saying that we did not leave the spot until we had searched minutely every nook and corner for traces of Mannering and his companion. But of him or of his belongings we found no sign. The fire had licked the cavern which had been his dwelling-place as bare as the rock face. There was nothing to show that either of them had reached the beach upon

## The Capture of the Conqueror 315

which we had landed, and as the tide was on the ebb I do not think that it would have been possible for any man to have stemmed it in the rocky channel which led to the bay. Nevertheless, we landed parties and scoured the country for miles around. But from no direction did we ascertain that any one had been seen who would in the slightest degree answer to the description of either of the two pirates.

What afforded more grief to the sailors than even Mannering's disappearance was the fact that the Pirate's hoard had also vanished. The search for this was still more unremitting than the search for definite proof of Mannering's death. Every loose piece of rock in the neighbourhood was overturned, but neither of the gold which he had taken from the *Dunster Castle*, nor of the diamonds he had obtained from the same source, was there the slightest trace. A year has now elapsed, and the search for the treasure has been made by others — by many others, but without result. Amongst the searchers, I have been informed, the most persistent is the respectable director of the diamond mine, whose despair at being despoiled led him to make the personal attack upon Mannering on the bridge of the *Union Castle* liner. I have recently heard, indeed, that he has bought the piece of land on that northern Spanish coast on the foreshore of which lies the entrance to the rock-bound pools, and that a notice now appears at the entrance warning off trespassers in five different languages. To me this seems a really touching example of Hebraic optimism.

## 316      The Cruise of the Conqueror

But to return to ourselves. We remained in the vicinity until the weather broke, and then with the beginning of the winter storms the *Mascot* bore us safely back to Southampton, where the crew was paid off and the yacht was handed over to her original owners.

Withington I see frequently, for he divides his time pretty equally between his native land and this country. Edith Withington has remained in England, for there is a young recently promoted commander of one of H. M. cruisers, in whom she exhibits a good deal of interest, who happens to be stationed in home waters. We see much of him, and I am glad to think that his love-affairs are not likely to disturb his appetite.

As for the *Conqueror*, she is berthed alongside the *Mist* in Salcombe Harbour. I sailed her under my own name in this year's Cross-Channel race, and she won for the second time, even though Withington had built a new *Challenger* for the express purpose of wresting the prize from her. He hopes for better luck next year, but we shall see. Mannering knew what he was about when he built her, and to him and Sanders—particularly to Sanders—I owe the possession of the blue ribbon of the motor-boating world.

Of Mannering, not a trace has been discovered. It has been taken for granted that he must have met his death by drowning or by fire. It is, indeed, difficult to conceive that he can have escaped. I have never heard of or from him. If he were alive, I should

## The Capture of the Conqueror 317

expect to hear of his existence. Yet I sometimes find myself wondering whether some day I shall not do so. He allowed seven years to pass before he reëntered the world of the living after the last occasion when he disappeared. He might return again. A man who has plunged from a cliff in a motor-car without injury may have escaped that seemingly all-devouring burst of flame. I remember, too, what he told me of his always providing a means of escape. He may be alive, after all. Who knows?

THE END.



